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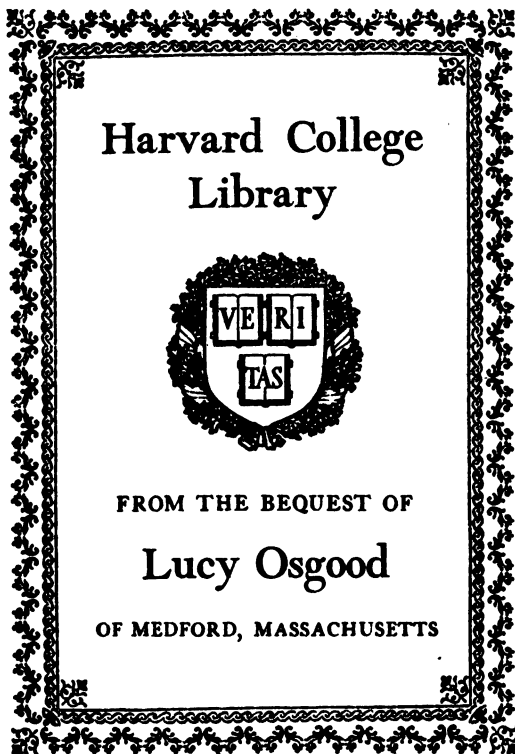
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NIGHTS AT THE PLAY.

VOL. II.

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

# NIGHTS AT THE PLAY

*A VIEW OF THE ENGLISH STAGE*

By DUTTON COOK

AUTHOR OF "HOURS WITH THE PLAYERS," "A BOOK OF THE PLAY,"  
"ART IN ENGLAND," ETC.



*IN TWO VOLUMES*

VOL. II.

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London

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1883

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# NIGHTS AT THE PLAY.

LXXV.

“PHILIP.”

[Lyceum Theatre.—February 1874.]<sup>1</sup>

BALZAC in one of his minor stories relates how a jealous husband, upon his wife's denial that her lover is secreted in a closet, has the door by which only escape is possible bricked up, and so leaves the hidden gentleman to perish. This incident, which has rather a mediæval flavour about it, and may not have been of Balzac's own inventing, found its way to the stage some twenty years ago in a drama which Mr. Morris Barnett adapted from the French, and presented at the Princess's Theatre during the management of Mr. Charles Kean. The English version of the play was called “The Married Unmarried;” Mr. Ryder personated the vindictive husband, and Miss Heath the suspected wife; the period was the Consulate of Napoleon, and the actual process of immuring the unfortunate lover was fully exhibited to the audience. Eventually, however, he was permitted to emerge from his prison by the destruction of its outer wall, and even to wed the lady for whose sake he had suffered so much, her first marriage having been con-

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veniently dissolved, probably on account of incompatibility of temper, by the order of the First Consul, or it may have been the Pope. To this story, dealt with by Balzac and by the author of "The Married Unmarried," Mr. Hamilton Aidé's new play of "Philip" stands indebted for its origin. Mr. Aidé, however, has supplied so much additional matter and so treated the subject that his drama must by no means be considered as deficient in inventiveness or novelty. The "bricking up" incident is reserved for the last of four acts, and though very elaborately prepared for, is somewhat abruptly despatched when the time arrives for its presentment; and it does not in truth prove especially effective in performance. The scene of the first or introductory act is laid in Andalusia, and the events of the fable are supposed to be of modern occurrence. *Philip* and *Juan* are half-brothers, the sons of the old *Countess de Miraflore*. *Philip* is described as "a rough Esau;" *Juan* as "a smooth-tongued Jacob." Both wear handsome Spanish costumes, and both are much in love with *Marie*, a young French girl, whom their mother has removed from a convent to be her companion and attendant. *Philip's* love is of a worthy kind, but *Juan's* designs upon *Marie* appear to be not wholly honourable. The Countess, however, informed by *Juan* that *Philip* proposes to make *Marie* his wife, indignantly dismisses the girl from her service. After *Marie's* departure the brothers quarrel furiously. *Juan* attempts to stab *Philip*, and *Philip* succeeds in shooting *Juan*. Believing himself guilty of murder, *Philip* then hastens to escape from Spain, and the first act concludes. The story is not resumed until eight years are supposed to have elapsed. *Marie* is now found to be the companion of *Mdme. de Privoisin*, a Parisian lady of fashion. *Philip* reappears as the *Comte de St. Léon*. He has been long

absent in America, has speculated successfully, and become possessed of a large fortune and of the gloomy Château de St. Léon, in Brittany. The only object of this second act, which introduces many superfluous characters and abounds in purposeless dialogue, appears to be the reunion of *Philip* and *Marie*. He renews his protestations of affection, and she consents to become his wife. Of the murder she is unaware, and, in the interest, it may be presumed, of the plot of the play, she refrains from asking indiscreet questions concerning the fate of her old lover, *Juan*. In the next act *Philip* and *Marie*, as a newly married couple, are occupants of the Château de St. Léon. The husband is disturbed, not merely by remorse on account of his crime committed more than eight years since, but he is also jealous of a certain *Count de Flamarens*, who had expressed great admiration for *Marie* during her sojourn in Paris, and who is understood to be still troubling her with his addresses. Presently a mysterious stranger arrives, and soon discloses his acquaintance with the murderous episode in the early life of *Philip*. The stranger is of course *Juan* in disguise, intent upon revenge. He has discovered somehow *Philip's* change of name, and his union with *Marie*. He is bent upon punishing the assassin and upon relieving him of his wife. We are then brought to the last scene, and to the "bricking up" incident. In *Philip's* absence *Juan* has visited *Marie* by night, abandoning his disguise and repeating the avowal of his passion for her, the fact that she is his brother's wife notwithstanding. Upon the sudden return of the husband *Juan* is hidden in *Marie's* oratory. *Philip*, believing that it is his wife's lover, the *Count de Flamarens*, who is in concealment, orders certain masons, who conveniently happen to be on the premises, to wall up the oratory door. After



an angry scene *Juan* discloses himself. In his joy at finding that he is no longer chargeable with murder, *Philip* is content to forget his brother's shameful conduct towards *Marie*. *Juan* departs relinquishing his vengeful schemes; the husband and wife are reconciled; and the play concludes after a tolerably comfortable fashion.

In the romantic drama probability or even intelligibility is not much to be considered, provided always there is a sufficient supply of theatrical surprise and effect. In "*Philip*," although the curtain fell to enthusiastic applause, the interest excited is never strong, while the earlier scenes were found to be oppressive, from a certain sluggishness of action and an over-abundance of futile conversation. Moreover, the characters move sympathy but slightly: *Philip* is throughout monotonously gloomy, *Juan* is a very worthless person, while *Marie* is so obscurely portrayed that there is even some doubt at last whether she has really awarded her preference to her husband or to his brother. The writing is pleasant and unpretentious enough, although there are occasional lapses into inelegance, to say the least of it, as, for instance, when the *Count de Flamarens* inquires of *M<sup>me</sup>. de Privoisin* concerning "her little game." The success of the play upon its first representation could not be questioned, however.

Mr. Irving's performance of the hero presents many artistic qualities, marred, however, by excess of effort and elaboration and too manifest a consciousness of the presence of the audience. The part is purely of a melodramatic kind, requiring simple force and breadth of treatment rather than any special histrionic subtlety, for which indeed it offers few opportunities. Mr. Irving's exertions were rewarded, as indeed they deserved to be, with frequent applause. Mr. Clayton is an efficient representa-

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tive of *Juan*, Miss Isabel Bateman appears as *Marie*, and Miss Virginia Francis invests with sufficient importance the subordinate character of *Mdme. de Privoisin*. The scenery and stage appointments are very complete, and Mr. Aidé has exemplified his versatility by enriching his play with a tuneful boating-song, which obtains a most favourable reception.

## LXXVI.

## "THE WHITE PILGRIM."

[Court Theatre.—February 1874.]

THE events of the story of the new poetic drama "The White Pilgrim" are supposed to occur in Norway at a period comprehensively described as the "early Christian era." *Harold*, the hero, is a young Pagan knight, who, like the *Robert* of Meyerbeer's opera, is alternately subjected to the influences for good or for evil of his two chief companions. On the one hand, he is urged by *Sigurd*, a hunchback, to plunge into vice and profligacy of all kinds; on the other hand, he finds a good genius in *Thordisa*, a Christian maiden whom he loves, and by whom he is loved. To win favour from *Thordisa*, *Harold* has even sheltered a band of Christian worshippers in a ruined chapel under the shadow of his castle walls, and has thereby incurred the furious reproaches of *Sigurd*, who would rather persecute the followers of the new faith with fire and sword. The absence of *Thordisa* upon a distant pilgrimage gives *Sigurd* for a time absolute rule over the weak and vacillating *Harold*. The young man in a fit of drunkenness is induced to renew a vow, first made by *Earl Olaf*, his remote ancestor, that he will with his own hand put to death the first Norman who shall cross his threshold—a month being allowed for

the accomplishment of the murder. For this incident of the oath the drama is avowedly indebted to the story of "Sintram," by De La Motte Fouquet; but "The White Pilgrim" is in every other respect to be viewed as an original work. Now the legend relates that as *Earl Olaf* swore his fearful oath, Death, in the guise of "a sad and white-robed figure," stood beside him and registered his vow. So when *Harold* repeats the form of the oath, the spectral White Pilgrim reappears and witnesses that procedure. *Harold* has encouraged himself to take the vow by the reflection that "no Norman foot has ever trod our coast for years." But no sooner has the ceremony been completed than the warder's horn is sounded, and *Sir Hugo*, a knight of Normandy, accompanied by his wife, the *Lady Isabelle*, enters the castle claiming its hospitality. Under the conditions of his oath *Harold* is bound to slay his guest within one month or to forfeit his own life. Tortured by doubt and remorse, he defers the fulfilment of his pledge to the last moment, and meanwhile beguiles himself with an unaccountable passion for the *Lady Isabelle*. Upon the last day of the month *Thordisa* returns from her pilgrimage to find her *Harold* false. He has even determined upon silencing the Christians in the ruined chapel, whose prayers and praises disturb his love-making, and appears bent upon very reckless courses indeed. Upon the intercession of *Thordisa*, however, *Harold* eventually breaks his oath, and consents to the safe departure of the Norman, offering his life as the penalty of his sins to *Sir Hugo*. The Norman knight declines the office of executioner, and absolves *Harold* of all blame. But *Harold*, exhausted by the mental emotions he has undergone, swoons and dies in the arms of *Thordisa*, who survives him but a few minutes. The hunchback *Sigurd* withdraws angrily denouncing the degene-

racy of his period, and as the curtain descends the spectral White Pilgrim appears for the last time, hovering over the corpses of *Harold* and *Thordisa*.

The literary merits of "The White Pilgrim" are remarkable. The play is written in vigorous, resonant blank verse, but rarely marred by an infirm or unmusical line, and containing many stirring and fervid passages, fairly leavened with poetry of a worthy kind, if not perhaps of the very first quality; and much dramatic skill has been exhibited in dealing with the subject for the purposes of the stage and rendering it intelligible to the spectators. Unity of place even has been strictly regarded, and throughout the play the scene representing the exterior of *Harold's* castle remains unchanged. Still the reception of "The White Pilgrim" was not wholly favourable, and occasionally, indeed, the audience gave free expression to their dissatisfaction. This arose in part, no doubt, from the many defects in the performance; but the subject of the play must be held accountable for a measure of the discontent that was manifested. All the author's adroitness has not enabled him to veil the fact that his story is far better adapted for a narrative poem than for a stage play. "The White Pilgrim" lacks the kind of interest that is effective in a theatre; the characters fail to excite the sympathy of a general audience. *Harold's* oath, the main incident in the fable, is really but the result of a drunken frolic; he binds himself so fatally for the schoolboy reason that he has been "dared" to that act by *Sigurd* the hunchback, who resembles *Mephistopheles* in his advocacy of evil, and *Silenus* in his habits of intemperance. The Norman knight, who by mere accident seems likely to fall a victim to *Harold's* folly, does not awaken much concern, while the *Lady Isabelle* is altogether unnecessary to the story; her

love passages with her host being at once vague and insipid. But the greatest misfortune of the work is the necessity for introducing upon the scene the figure of Death in the aspect of the White Pilgrim. There appears to have been no help for it but to revert to that conventional ghost which was thought to be securely laid when old-fashioned melodrama of the "Castle Spectre" school was finally shelved. The apparition enters through a hole cut in a scene representing a distant view, and delivers a long address, which completely failed to impress the audience. It is desirable that in future performances the occupation of the spectre should be reduced as much as possible, and that some improved arrangements should be adopted for its entrance upon the stage.

Mr. George Rignold is the impersonator of *Harold*. The actor is throughout animated and energetic, even to excess. He is quite unskilled in the art of delivering blank verse, and reduces all his speeches to a kind of grotesque and uncomfortable prose. Mr. Hermann Vezin appears as *Sigurd*, and spares no exertions to give effect to a part which does not lie conveniently within his means as an actor. The rather colourless character of *Thordisa* is undertaken by Miss Moodie. Mr. Bruce as *Rolf*, *Harold's* foster-brother, has the merit of reciting distinctly the legend of *Earl Olaf's* oath, which forms the basis of the drama. Mr. Hann has supplied the one scene of the drama—the exterior of *Harold's* castle, with the rockbound coast of Norway in the distance.

## LXXVII.

## "MARY QUEEN O' SCOTS."

[Princess's Theatre.—February 1874.]

MR. W. G. WILLS has written a new historical play bearing the lengthy title of "Mary Queen o' Scots ; or, The Catholic Queen and the Protestant Reformer." Queen Mary has hitherto appeared upon our stage in the French and Italian versions of Schiller's tragedy, presented during the brief visits to this country of Rachel and Ristori ; in theatrical adaptations of "The Abbot" of Sir Walter Scott ; and in Banks's turgid old play of "The Island Queens ; or, The Death of Mary Queen of Scots," which the famous Mrs. Oldfield first made popular, but which has now remained many years neglected. Mr. Wills, however, stands in no wise indebted to any of these earlier productions, but has founded his play upon events which have for the most part escaped the manipulation of other dramatists, although Mr. Swinburne's "Chastelard," which is less perhaps to be viewed as a play than as a poem, deals with some portion of the theme of "Mary Queen o' Scots." Mr. Wills has limited himself to the more youthful years of the Queen's life. Upon the opening of the play she is found to be the widow of the French King, and on the point of quitting France for Scotland. Darnley is not introduced upon the

scene, nor is his name once mentioned, and when the curtain descends Mary is left unprovided with a second husband. She is thus younger by some twenty years than the heroine of Schiller's tragedy, which exhibits the final imprisonment of the unfortunate Queen at Fotheringay, and her execution for her alleged complicity in Babington's treason. It is obvious that the more dramatic passages in Mary's history are not comprised in the period chosen by Mr. Wills for illustration upon the stage; and it must be added that he has made but unskilful use of the materials he has preferred to operate upon. "Mary Queen o' Scots" suffers from its lack of incident and from an irksome sameness that pervades the whole play. The dramatist may be entitled to plead the historical nature of his subject in answer to the demand for a coherent story; but the absence of animation, interest, and effectiveness is not to be satisfactorily accounted for in this way. And Mr. Wills's views of history are certainly eccentric. In his tragedy of "Charles the First" he laboured to make *Cromwell* contemptible; in "Mary Queen o' Scots" he has aimed at presenting *John Knox* in a ludicrous light. The "Protestant Reformer" appears as a comic character, speaking a broad Scottish dialect, such as is usually assumed by actors personating *Sir Pertinax McSycophant* or *Bailie Nicol Jarvie*. A peculiarity of this kind is hardly to be justified in a drama of poetic pretensions—otherwise *Macbeth* himself might be represented as afflicted with a North British accent. Further, *John Knox* is supposed to be, if not absolutely the lover of *Queen Mary*, still so inflamed an admirer of her beauty, that he likens himself to St. Anthony yielding to temptation when, upon her solicitation, he interferes to protect her favourite, *Chastelard*, from the vengeful fury of a Protestant mob. The first meeting of *Knox* and



*Mary* occurs in the second act, when, mounted on a white horse, she is about to enter Edinburgh; he denounces her as a Papist, and endeavours to incite the citizens to close the town gates against her. The play, indeed, consists mainly of long conversations, more or less polemical in tone, between the *Queen* and the *Reformer*, with occasional reference to the story of *Chastelard*. *Rizzio* is introduced as the Queen's secretary, hardly yet aspiring to be her lover; and *Lord James Murray*, the Queen's brother, from time to time occupies the stage. *Chastelard's* love for *Mary* is set forth at some length, although it completely fails to prove interesting in representation, while the condemnation and execution of the lover move sympathy in a very slight degree. By the time, however, that this, the catastrophe of the play, had been arrived at, the audience were in too exhausted a condition possibly to indulge in any expression of emotion; for in truth Mr. Wills's new drama is a very wearisome production, and its defects in this respect were greatly aggravated by the inferiority of the actors concerned in the representation. But even histrionic art of the highest class could scarcely have secured favour for "Mary Queen o' Scots." Mr. Wills, although his blank verse is crude and inharmonious, writes with vigour, is gifted with a considerable measure of poetic fancy, and has a decided view of the characters he designs to place upon the stage; but he is deficient in constructive skill as a dramatist, and he is regardless both of the predilections and of the powers of endurance of his audience. "Mary Queen o' Scots" is not so much a drama as a collection of speeches which have the misfortune to be delivered very indifferently. Much has been done by the management, however, to give to the play the attractiveness of a pageant. New and handsome scenery

has been painted representing the "old garden and pleasure" at Fontainebleau, a view of Edinburgh during the triumphant entry of the *Queen*, and various interiors of Holyrood Palace. The costumes are appropriate and costly, and numerous supernumeraries fill the stage as soldiers and citizens, and form the mob that forcibly intrudes into the Royal Chapel demanding the death of *Chastelard* and the destruction of "the idols of Baal." As a spectacle, the play, no doubt, may claim applause.

The chief characters are sustained by Mr. and Mrs. Rousby, for whom they were probably devised. The lady is a most picturesque representative of the young *Queen*, and assumes a variety of superb costumes; but her acting shows no departure from that complacent feebleness which has usually attended her histrionic efforts. The part is, of course, far less taxing to its representative than is Schiller's heroine; still it appears susceptible of a more effective rendering than the limited nature of Mrs. Rousby's art enables her to award to it. Mr. Rousby's curious impersonation of *John Knox* afforded entertainment to the gallery, at any rate. Mr. Rousby is not apparently practised in the imitation of Scottish peculiarities of speech, and may be excused, therefore, for his occasional recourse to the dialects of Yorkshire and other counties, and even for his lapsing now and then into the nasal and guttural intonation of Fagin the Jew. It is not, however, wholly the actor's fault that *John Knox* appears so divested of dignity as to be even rather an unseemly figure in the story. Mr. Harcourt failed to please in the part of *Chastelard* or to excite commiseration for the untimely end of the infatuated lover. *Rizzio* and *Lord James Murray* are subordinate characters which Mr. Darley and Mr. Fenton were unable to invest with much vitality.

## LXXVIII.

## "LADY CLANCARTY."

[Olympic Theatre.—March 1874.]

IN the last volume of his "History of England," Lord Macaulay pointed out that the early marriage and misfortunes of the Jacobite Earl of Clancarty might furnish a good subject to a novelist or a dramatist. Mr. Tom Taylor has availed himself of this suggestion, and contrived a play which may not perhaps claim to possess any very remarkable merit, but which is yet found to be sufficiently effective in representation. *Lord Clancarty* when a boy of fifteen was married to a bride of eleven, *Lady Elizabeth Spencer*, the daughter of the Earl of Sunderland. After the ceremony the youthful husband and wife were parted, and, as Macaulay relates, many years, full of strange events, elapsed before they met again. The Earl had turned Roman Catholic, and, following the fortunes of James the Second, had been compelled to surrender to Marlborough at Cork; his estates had been confiscated, and after enduring three years' imprisonment in the Tower, he had escaped to the Continent, and been graciously received by the Court at St. Germain. The Treaty of Ryswick having destroyed all hope that the banished dynasty would be restored by foreign arms, *Clancarty* sought to make peace

with the English Government. He stole across the Channel and obtained an interview with the young wife from whom he had so long been parted. He found her fondly devoted to his interests, but from her father, Sunderland, and his son, *Lord Charles Spencer*, it was clear the proscribed and ruined Jacobite could expect no mercy. He was torn from his wife's arms and conveyed again to the Tower. In vain did *Lady Clancarty* follow him and implore permission to share his cell. He was saved from death upon the scaffold only by the intervention of the famous Lady Russell, who took the unhappy young wife with her to Whitehall and obtained from *William* the pardon of *Clancarty*. His estates were forfeited—they had indeed already been bestowed upon Lord Woodstock, the eldest son of the Duke of Portland—but a small pension was granted to him, and, accompanied by his faithful *Elizabeth*, he retired to Altona, in compliance with the condition of his pardon, that he should quit the kingdom and never return to it. Of his subsequent fate there seems to be no record.

Mr. Taylor has dealt with these materials after a rather prosaic fashion, introducing many incidents that have seen much service in earlier melodramas, and thus imparting a commonplace air to his play. *Lord Clancarty's* story is in truth more pathetic and impressive in the pages of Macaulay than in the theatrical guise it has been constrained to assume upon the stage of the Olympic. The dramatist at once sacrifices much of the romance and interest of his theme by allowing it to be supposed that *Clancarty* is unable to recognise his wife in the young lady he has accidentally met and rescued in the old conventional way from the attack of a party of smugglers, and with whom he subsequently finds himself to be in love. In this way his reunion with his wife is treated more as the result of

accident than of design. In order to fortify the story for dramatic purposes, and to find some excuse perhaps for its division into four inordinately long acts, Mr. Taylor has implicated *Clancarty* in the Assassination Plot of 1696, with which he had really no concern. Lady Russell is not introduced upon the scene, no doubt because her just claims to the regard of the audience might interfere with the sympathy due to *Lady Clancarty*. There is quite a sufficiency of historical personages, however, with frequent and most wearisome references to the political events and opinions of the period. If "*Lady Clancarty*" were less historical, it would be so much the more dramatic, and might in such wise count upon a more enduring success than it will probably achieve. But Mr. Taylor has covered the work with so heavy and opaque a coating of what is called "local colour," that occasionally form and outline and meaning become completely lost to sight. The interest is by no means strong, but it would prove adequate for a drama of reasonable dimensions if it were less subjected to interruption and suspension. The play, however, may no doubt be somewhat improved by revision and the removal of much dull and superfluous dialogue. The characters have at present a way of lecturing each other at most inconvenient opportunities, regardless of the oppressive effect of their proceedings upon the audience. But, allowing for the author's prosiness and prolixity, the earlier scenes develop the story clearly enough, and often exhibit considerable ingenuity of contrivance. The last act, however, is very weak, and should be reduced forthwith to one brief scene explanatory of the pardon of *Clancarty*. The fate of the traitor *Cardell Goodman* excites little interest, and might safely be withdrawn from the stage. Moreover, it is probable that *Goodman*, who, all his crimes

notwithstanding, had been a member of the University of Cambridge, an actor of some distinction, and the favoured lover of the Duchess of Cleveland, was far less ruffianly in aspect and manner than he is represented to be in "Lady Clancarty." An underplot relating to the loves and jealousies of *Lord Woodstock* and *Lady Betty Noel* is certainly trite and tedious enough; but it is perhaps too closely interwoven with the main story to be wholly suppressed.

Mr. Henry Neville is an animated representative of *Lord Clancarty*, and obtains much applause by his unflagging exertions. *Lady Clancarty* is personated by Miss Cavendish with intelligence and some power, if with excess of artifice and elaboration and too manifest a straining after effect. Mr. Vernon plays creditably as the acrimonious and merciless Whig, *Lord Charles Spencer*; and Mr. Charles Neville supplies an artistic and sympathetic sketch of *William the Third*.

## LXXIX.

## “READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.”

[Court Theatre.—March 1874.]

THE story of “Ready-Money Mortiboy,” which has been converted by its authors, Messrs. Walter Besant and James Rice, into a drama, is so far to be distinguished from the fables usually occupying the stage, that it deals more in grim humour and a sort of jocose cynicism than in matters of romance and sentiment, and dispenses with the aid of a hero and a heroine, as such personages are generally constituted, in favour of a group of most unworthy characters. *Ready-Money Mortiboy*, as readers of the story will remember, is a banker, usurer, and miser, who has discarded his only son, *Dick Mortiboy*, on account of a forgery committed by the young man when a clerk in his father’s office. After a long lapse of years, *Dick*, who has been absent in America and the colonies, returns and obtains his father’s forgiveness, not because there is any penitence on the one side or parental affection on the other, but for quite other reasons. *Old Mortiboy* pardons the prodigal, believing him to have returned home the possessor of a large fortune ; but *Dick* is in truth as penniless as when he was expelled from his father’s roof ; his wealth is a mere pretence the better to enable him to plunder his parent. *Dick’s* scheme pro-

mises to be successful in the first instance; it seems probable that *Ready-Money Mortiboy* will fall an easy prey to his son's machinations. The miser, however, is found to be more reluctant to part with his money than had been anticipated, and *Dick* thereupon consents that his villanous friend and partner, one *Alcide Lafleur*, a half-caste from the island of Mauritius, shall administer laudanum to the old man and afterwards rifle his cash-box. This crime is rendered unnecessary by the voluntary proceeding of the miser, who, satisfied that he has but a little while longer to live, and very anxious to save his estate from diminution on account of legacy or probate duty, executes a deed of gift, under virtue of which his whole property becomes vested in his son *Dick*. After a lapse of some months, in the course of which old *Mr. Mortiboy* is supposed to have departed this life, *Dick* is exhibited as a banker and landed proprietor of great wealth, bent upon philanthropic undertakings for the benefit of his country, and much in love with his cousin, *Miss Grace Heathcote*. *Dick's* suit is hopeless, however, for the young lady has bestowed her affections upon her kinsman, *Frank Melliship*, who has been ruined by the malpractices of the elder *Mortiboy*, and, moreover, *Dick* is already provided with a wife in the person of *Polly Tresler*, his father's housemaid, who is by no means disposed to relinquish her claims upon her husband. Even when it is made apparent that *Polly* in marrying *Dick* has committed bigamy—for she had previously bestowed her hand upon a mariner who still survives—*Dick's* case is little bettered, for *Miss Heathcote's* preference for *Frank Melliship* is not to be shaken. *Dick* then generously provides for his rival, enabling him to marry *Grace* by admitting him to a share in the banking business of the house of *Mortiboy*; and when presently *Dick* is shot in a fierce brawl with his old partner,



*Alcide Lafleur*, the play concludes suddenly with a suggestion that he has met the punishment due for his many misdeeds.

It will be seen that no attempt is made to stir sympathy except in regard to the thoroughness of the leading characters. These are most forcibly presented, limned in very striking colours, and no mistake is for a moment possible concerning them. Dick is from first to last a very consummate scoundrel, though it is to be said for him that he is never contemptible. Indeed, his lack of heart, conscience, and moral principle seems to be a natural defect in his constitution, for which he is hardly to be held accountable. And he even secures a measure of respect from the audience by reason of his supreme audacity, his physical gifts of strength and activity, and a certain animal fidelity which induces him in dying to conceal the name of his assassin, his old Californian partner and fellow-criminal. For *Old Mortiboy* toleration is secured on account of the drollery of his systematic stinginess and absurd persistence in small economies ; indeed, the authors have succeeded in giving something of a comical air to his total want of affection for his son and his greedy anxiety to turn the prodigal into a source of profit. *Alcide Lafleur* is a more conventional villain, but he is portrayed with considerable vigour, and plays an impressive part in the story. It is, perhaps, a consequence of the force of these delineations that the more respectable characters wear rather an insipid air. In the loves of *Grace Heathcote* and *Frank Melliship* it is not possible to take very much interest, while *Mr.* and *Mrs. Heathcote*, the father and mother of *Grace* and *Lydia*, her sister, who appear and disappear at intervals in the course of the representation, have but little real connection with the story in its dramatic form. The play is in four

acts, and "unity of place" has been so much considered that each act consists of but one scene only. The authors, who are probably unpractised in writing for the stage, have undoubtedly accomplished the task they undertook with very commendable skill. They have here and there been embarrassed by the redundance of their materials, and the play of "Ready-Money Mortiboy" is certainly a work of inferior worth to the novel bearing the same name; still, in right of its freshness, force, and humour, the production well merited the hearty applause it obtained.

Mr. George Rignold has all the personal qualifications for the part of *Dick Mortiboy*, and plays with his usual energy and something more than his usual judgment. But the chief success of the evening was obtained by Mr. Clifford Cooper in the part of *Ready-Money Mortiboy*. The actor's name may not be very widely known, but he is clearly in possession of an excellent histrionic method. His apparent unconsciousness of the presence of the audience is remarkable, the while he is able to present a highly artistic and thoroughly effective portrayal of the "rich and miserly banker," as *Ready-Money Mortiboy* is described in the play-bill. Miss Henderson is a most efficient representative of the bigamist *Polly Tresler*, *Dick Mortiboy's* wife, until the detectives discover her earlier marriage; and Miss Litton contrives, by grace of manner and intelligence of aspect, to lend all possible interest to the minor character of *Miss Heathcote*. Mr. Crosse, an actor new to London, appears creditably as *Frank Melliship*; and Mr. Edgar Bruce is a melodramatic impersonator of the villanous *Lafleur*.

## LXXX.

## "WIG AND GOWN."

[Globe Theatre.—April 1874.]

THE hero of "Wig and Gown," the new domestic drama, written by Mr. Albery, is a *Mr. Hammond Coote*, a barrister, to whom fortune has not been kind. No briefs ever come to him, and, moreover, there are constitutional difficulties in the way of his professional progress. He is without much self-respect; he is absurdly timid and irresolute; and, as he himself explains, is far more likely to be worried by witnesses than to be able to worry them. He clings to his status as a barrister, however, is duly provided with wig and gown, and boasts a share in chambers and in a clerk; but he, in truth, subsists by letting furnished lodgings. The income thus derived is most insufficient to meet the requirements of himself, his rather ambitious wife, who affects to have aristocratic relations, his daughter *Victoria*, and his two sons; and the many miserable shifts and subterfuges the family are compelled to resort to in order to maintain their position, in appearance at least, are very fully set forth. But there is a sudden change in the prospects of the *Cootes*. Just as *Mrs. Coote*, despairing of her husband's advancement at the bar, is about to cut up his stuff gown in order that she may make a new jacket for her younger boy, a brief,

with a cheque for fifty guineas, is delivered to the barrister. It is to appear for the defendant in an ejectment case regarding the ownership of the Kenreutie estates, a claimant to these having presented himself in the person of one *James Strickett*, pretending to be the lawful son and heir of the late *Lord Kenreutie*. The defendant is the *Hon. Miss Kenreutie*, sister to the late lord, who chances to be a lodger in *Mr. Coote's* house, and who conceives an extravagant idea of the abilities of her landlord, much as Betsy Trotwood in "David Copperfield" over-estimates the mental endowments of Mr. Dick. *Mr. Coote*, however, is indebted for his brief less to the friendship and admiration of *Miss Kenreutie* than to the machinations of one *Sonbyson Siel*, long connected with the *Kenreutie* family, and now, for purposes of his own, plotting with the impostor *Strickett* to obtain possession of the estates. It is *Mr. Siel's* plan that *Miss Kenreutie* shall suffer defeat owing to the incompetence of her advocate. The cause is duly tried, and *Mr. Coote's* mistakes are many and serious. He establishes to the disadvantage of his client the fact that the late *Lord Kenreutie* had secretly married and had left a son, the lawful issue of that union. But when there is an endeavour to prove that *James Strickett* is no other than this son, *Mr. Coote* performs really important services. It is true that he deprives his client of the estates, but he absolutely overthrows the plaintiff's case. For the facts that come out in evidence awaken memories of his own early life; link by link the chain of circumstances becomes more and more complete; he loses his diffidence and displays extraordinary energy, satisfactorily demonstrating at last that he is himself the rightful heir to the *Kenreutie* property. He had been a foundling, left with a miniature portrait and a few papers that are now of significance in proving his identity with the

missing child of the late lord. *Mr. Siel* faints away in the witness-box, and it is understood that with the claimant, *Strickett*, he will be prosecuted for perjury. *Miss Kenreutie* cheerfully recognises the superior title of *Mr. Coote*; and, surrendering the estates to him, is more than ever satisfied of his great abilities as an advocate; but there is now no further need for him to toil at the bar, and, retiring from the profession, he hands over his wig and gown to be the playthings of his children. Here the play should close, but in order that it may possess a third act, *Mr. Albery* has tacked on much superfluous matter touching the loves of *Victoria*, *Mr. Coote's* daughter, and *Fred Fairfoot*, a young surgeon, and the difficulty experienced in inducing *Mrs. Coote*, now *Lady Kenreutie*, to consent to the union of the young people. These proceedings have an air of after-thought about them, and wholly fail to interest; but they serve the dramatist's purpose in delaying the fall of the curtain, although at the price of inflicting considerable weariness on the audience.

The story of *Mr. Hammond Coote's* fortunes and misfortunes is humorous and ingenious enough, but in reducing it to a dramatic form the author has shown but indifferent skill. *Mr. Toole's* presence in the play is perhaps the excuse for its farcical excesses, verging occasionally upon buffoonery, although *Mr. Toole* has often demonstrated that he can act with artistic forbearance when so permitted by authors and audiences; but, in spite of certain improbabilities that disfigure it, the fable does not seem to invite the rude and reckless treatment to which it has been subjected. The first act displays creditable workmanship; the story is clearly opened, the characters are introduced with tolerable adroitness, and the humours of shabby gentility are presented in rather a new light. *Mr. Coote* is not,

perhaps, a very probable barrister, and his condition altogether seems certainly exceptional ; still, he is diverting, and even interesting, after a fashion. But in the second act the story moves so sluggishly that there seems danger of its stopping altogether while a burlesque representation of a court of justice occupies the scene ; insomuch that when the one strong dramatic point of the play is reached, and *Mr. Coote* makes the important discovery that his own history is involved in his client's defence, the attention of the audience has been so disturbed, and the art of the dramatist has proved to be so much at fault, that the effect created falls far short of what might legitimately have been anticipated. However, "Wig and Gown" contains many amusing scenes, is admirably acted, and secures a most flattering reception from the audience. The dialogue is throughout of a very vivacious description, aiming at laughter at all hazards, but less marked by those strainings after rather abstruse witticisms which have usually blemished Mr. Albery's writings. Of course, in the part of *Hammond Coote* Mr. Toole finds abundant opportunity for the exhibition of that drollery which is his especial property ; and it need hardly be said that he spares no exertions to obtain and to deserve the applause of his audience. The other characters are of minor importance, but *Mr. Cecil's* artistic performance of the judge in the trial scene is worthy of commendation, while Mr. Brough's care to invest the part of *Sonbyson Siel* with life and force merits recognition. *Fairfoot*, the young surgeon, is personated by Mr. Temple ; Miss Carlotta Addison appears as *Victoria Coote* ; and Miss Lavis undertakes the character of the vulgar and pretentious *Mrs. Coote*.

## LXXXI.

## "THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE."

[Gaiety Theatre.—April 1874.]

THE old comedy of "The Clandestine Marriage," which has not been represented for some seasons, has been revived in order that Mr. Phelps may appear as *Lord Ogleby*, a part in which he is quite without a rival. "The Clandestine Marriage," originally produced at Drury Lane Theatre in 1766, is the joint composition of George Colman and David Garrick, who obtained suggestions and materials for their play from various sources. The story avowedly owes its foundation to Hogarth's prints of "Marriage à la Mode," the authors avoiding, however, the more grim and tragic portions of the artist's plan; from a paper contributed by the Earl of Cork to "The Connoisseur" was mainly derived the humours of *Mr. Sterling's* rural life and passion for landscape gardening; while the earlier farce of "Lethe" had supplied characters corresponding to *Lord Ogleby* and his valet *Canton*. It has been alleged, indeed, that these characters, and also the part of *Mr. Sterling*, with much of the dialogue they are required to deliver, were directly taken from a farce called "False Concord," written by the Rev. James Townley, Master of Merchant Taylors' School. The statement, however, has never been substantiated, and cer-

tainly seems to be improbable. As George Colman the younger said of it: "It would be strange if Garrick robbed, or were accessory to his colleague's robbing, his friend Townley." Moreover, "False Concord" was never published, and was represented but once, on a benefit night at Covent Garden. The success of "The Clandestine Marriage" was not immediate; indeed, some opposition was stirred by the play; but the high spirits and vigour of Mrs. Clive in the part of the chamber-maid in the last scene are said to have silenced dissent and secured the fall of the curtain to great applause. This last act is clearly due to Garrick, and is a notable example of his skill in stage contrivance and his consummate knowledge of theatrical effect. The authors quarrelled—owing, it was understood, to Garrick's refusal to appear as *Lord Ogleby*, the character expressly devised for him, and a controversy subsequently arose, which has never yet been satisfactorily adjusted, as to the precise amount of labour contributed by each to the joint production. Probably the responsibility was divided between them in almost equal shares; but the matter is now hardly worth discussion. The original *Lord Ogleby* was King, an admired comedian, whose success in the character was very great, notwithstanding Garrick's opinion—"he certainly has great merit in the part, but he is not MY *Lord Ogleby*." It was as *Lord Ogleby*, it may be remembered, that the late Mr. Farren, who had been long a distinguished representative of the part, bade farewell to the stage some twenty years ago. Mr. Phelps has in late times assumed the character on various occasions, and always to the satisfaction of his audience. His impersonation is as remarkable for its humour and force as for its artistic elaboration. *Lord Ogleby's* foibles are presented in a sufficiently ridiculous light, while yet in right of his courtli-



ness and a measure of magnanimity that he displays in his later scenes he does not fail to enlist the sympathies of the spectators, who are eventually persuaded both to like him and to laugh at him too. At the Gaiety the comedy is played in four instead of five acts, but little of the original text has been omitted, with the exception of the scene between lawyers *Traverse* and *Serjeant Flower*, which has no real connection with the story, and is suppressed without inconvenience. Mr. Phelps obtains commendable support from the members of the Gaiety company. Mr. Hermann Vezin is an efficient *Lovevell*, and Mr. Harcourt, although his high spirits are rather forced, does not spare zeal in his representation of the lively *Sir John Melvil*. Mr. Soutar is amusing in the part of *Canton*, the caricature of a Swiss valet, originally impersonated by Baddely, famous for his success in such characters, and as the actor to whose will the Drury Lane company is indebted for a twelfth-cake, consumed in the green-room of the theatre every year on the 6th of January. *Mrs. Heidelberg*, who is evidently a kinswoman of Mrs. Malaprop's, but who came upon the stage some ten years before that more celebrated lady, is played by Mrs. Leigh, perhaps with more energy than humour. Mr. Maclean appears as the City merchant, *Sterling*; and *Miss Sterling* and *Fanny*, are fairly represented by Miss Baldwin and Miss Loseby. Mrs. Clive's part of the chambermaid is intrusted to the competent hands of Miss Farren.

LXXXII.

"SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—April 1874.]

THIS highly embellished edition of "The School for Scandal" can only be likened to one of those ornate revivals of Shakspeare which distinguished Mr. Charles Kean's management of the Princess's. Extraordinary pains have been taken to perfect the representation even to the most minute details; there has been considerable change in the old-established method of performance, and great ingenuity has been exercised, in combination with very liberal expenditure, so to reset and renovate the play as to endow it with uncommon attractiveness in the eyes of modern playgoers. Only a thorough artist could have achieved such consummate stage pictures of life in the last century as are here presented; only a diligent student of costume could have attired the actors in a manner that is at once so appropriate and so elegant. And yet it can hardly be doubted that many objections to this new treatment of an old work will be raised; that there will be lamentation over the sacrifice of those stage traditions which have come to be considered in the light of vested interests; and that prophecies of evil will be heard touching the first invasion of the domain of comedy by the spirit of spectacle.

But if "The School for Scandal" was to be played at all at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, it is clear that it must have been produced "with a difference." The establishment has its prescriptions; it has acquired fame by the special character of its representations and the perfectness of its scenic decorations. Further, the limited size of its stage precludes the performance of a standard comedy after the forcible and highly coloured fashion adopted in larger houses. Change, in the way of "toning down," became indispensably necessary, and certain transpositions of the author's text, so as to avoid scene-shifting difficulties, have been judged expedient. The system of dramatic construction that has regard to "unity of place" was little valued in Sheridan's time, while the stage was then wholly unacquainted with the elaborately "set" and profusely furnished scenes which are now so much in vogue in our theatres. On the whole, the rearrangement of the play to suit it for performance at the Prince of Wales's Theatre inflicts no real injury upon the author's design; although it would certainly be more seemly if *Sir Peter's* squabbles with his spouse could be conducted in his own house rather than in the drawing-room of *Lady Sneerwell*, and if the play could close in *Joseph Surface's* library in preference to the residence of the *Teazles*, where, after the great catastrophe of the screen, *Mr. Surface* could hardly have presumed to appear. That *Charles* should sell his pictures in his dining-room without moving to another apartment for the purposes of the auction is decidedly advantageous to dramatic effect; and the other minor changes that have been adopted tend at any rate to the greater compactness of the play, although there seems to be no very obvious reason for the suppression of *Sir Peter's* scene with his ward *Maria*, in which he urges her to accept the suit of *Joseph Surface*. Of the

performance it may be said, that if it makes no specially salient displays of ability, it charms, nevertheless, by a certain air of harmony and finish that characterises it. Probably very few of the players have ever before sustained parts in "The School for Scandal," and yet there is scarcely an instance to be discovered of any sinking below the level of respectability, while on every side there is evidence of heedfulness and discipline and respect for histrionic art. That there is some shock to prepossessions, in the first instance, is indisputable, when established points are seen to be systematically avoided, when new "business" is substituted for old, and when there occurs reduction of the prominence usually attaching to particular scenes in favour of less familiar portions of the play. Still Sheridan is really found to be himself, and not less enjoyable than heretofore, for all the novelty and splendour of his present guise; and there is pleasure to be derived from such careful productions of last-century drawing-rooms and such adroit dressing and posing of the *dramatis personæ*, who wear the look, indeed, of animated portraits by Gainsborough and Sir Joshua. Even the minuet introduced in the second act, without any warrant for such a proceeding being discoverable in the text, may readily be forgiven, in right of its fidelity to past fashion and the extreme grace and skill with which it is accomplished by Miss Josephs, Miss Wilton, and their partners. Interest of an antiquarian kind is stirred, too, by *Sir Benjamin Backbite's* being viewed as a representative of the Maccaronis—"the travelled young men," as Walpole described them, "who wear long curls and spying-glasses." A Maccaroni, with his affected airs and fanciful attire, is not now a very conceivable creature, and in such wise an annotated edition of the comedy may some day be judged advisable, which may explain further, among other matters,

the references to "the Irish Tontine" and the introduction here of "Nova Scotia sheep." Mr. Coghlan's *Charles Surface* is a spirited assumption, that would have been notable in any representation of the comedy, and there is real merit in Mr. Bancroft's interpretation of the much more arduous character of *Joseph Surface*. The actor is careful to invest the part with the youthfulness of appearance which legitimately pertains to it, and, remembering that *Joseph*, for all his staidness of demeanour, enters freely into fashionable society, has restrained his hypocritical and sentimental airs within becoming bounds. Judgment has been exercised, too, in dealing with *Joseph's* addresses to *Lady Teazle*; it is discreetly indicated that his love is merely simulated, and is but a part of his scheme for possessing himself of the hand and fortune of *Maria*. As *Lady Teazle*, Miss Maria Wilton displays great vivacity and intelligence; her tiffs with *Sir Peter* could not be more adroitly carried on, while her speech at the close of the screen scene is most effective from the simple pathos of its delivery. Her ladyship is more of the country hoyden—a squire's daughter fresh from her tambour frame and Pope Joan with the curate—less of the consummate woman of fashion, than she is usually represented to be. Mrs. Jordan's interpretation of the part, however, was probably much as Mrs. Bancroft's is. Mr. Hare's *Sir Peter* is remarkable for its elaboration and finesse, but is curiously and unfortunately deficient in humour. Miss Josephs is all that could be desired as *Lady Sneerwell*, and Mrs. Murray is a competent *Mrs. Candour*. Mr. Collette does justice to the part of *Sir Oliver*, and Mr. A. Wood's *Crabtree* would be irreproachable if he could refrain from adding to the text he is required to deliver. After mention of the double letter from Northamptonshire, *Crabtree* is

not required by Sheridan to express doubt as to whether the postage was or was not paid upon that famous missive. In so laborious a revival it is certainly surprising to find that any of the old and unjustifiable "gags" should be retained by the actors.

## LXXXIII.

## “LED ASTRAY.”

[Gaiety Theatre.—July 1874.]

MR. BOUCICAULT's new drama proves to be little more than a literal translation of M. Octave Feuillet's five-act comedy of “*La Tentation*,” first represented in Paris at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in 1860, and some five years afterwards, under the name of “*A Dangerous Friend*,” played in English at the Haymarket Theatre. The events of the story are supposed to be of modern occurrence, the scene is laid in Normandy and Paris, and the characters are French, with the exception of *M. Georges Gordon Trévélyan*, who is understood to be a poet of Irish origin, and a certain *Cowperson*, a comic Englishman, with so imperfect a command of the French tongue that he is frequently compelled to express himself in his own language. In aid of the interpreter of this part, M. Feuillet on publishing his play provided instruction on the subject of English pronunciation. *Cowperson*, admiring the estate of the *Comte de Vardes*, is required to say, “This park and mansion are indeed beautiful! How much they remind me (*sic*) the shady avenues and lofty turrets of Walsing Hall!” According to M. Feuillet, the French actor should pronounce these words as though they were written:—“Pârk annd mann-

shone ère inndid biautifoul! Haou meutch zey rimaïnde mi ze shédé avénious annd lofté tarrets of Walsinng Haul!" This strange Englishman, *Cowperson*, has been converted by Mr. Boucicault into an Irish major named *O'Hara*, while the Irish poet, *Trévéllyan*, appears in "Led Astray" as *George de Lesparre*, a French novelist. The other alterations introduced by Mr. Boucicault consist chiefly of the substitution of the names of *Rodolphe*, *Hector*, *Armande*, and *Mathilde*, for those of *Gontran*, *Achille*, *Camille*, and *Hélène*, which M. Feuillet has bestowed upon his *dramatis personæ*—a change apparently due rather to capriciousness than ingenuity on the part of the English playwright. The title of "Led Astray," it may be noted, conveys an unjust idea of M. Feuillet's story. His heroine is much tempted, is, indeed, always on the brink of error, but she does not really fall into it. The *Count*, her husband, goes astray, no doubt, but then he is not led, but rather a leader in the direction of vice. The defect of the play arises from the inability of these characters to arouse more sympathy than they deserve in the minds of the audience. The *Count*, addicted to field sports to the neglect of his wife, is a pompous, self-satisfied person, priding himself upon his high sense of honour, yet carrying on a disgraceful intrigue in his own house with an Irish adventuress, the sister of *Major O'Hara*. The *Countess*, sighing for the appreciation she fails to obtain from her husband, affects superior intelligence, gives way to sentimentality, and delights in the admiration she secures from the novelist, *George de Lesparre*. A duel is fought between the husband and the lover. The husband is wounded, but he has yet the lover's life at his mercy. The *Count*, however, for all his airs of rage and jealousy, is well satisfied of his wife's innocence in regard to *George de Lesparre*. She has been guilty of not loving her husband;



but he is himself a far greater offender—he has not only not loved his wife, but he has loved somebody else. *George de Lesparre* is spared, therefore, and forthwith prudently disappears from the play. For some time husband and wife live apart, although the same roof shelters them. They desire for their daughter's sake to keep up the appearance of agreement and to avoid scandal. The arrangements for their daughter's marriage bring about their reconciliation, or rather the patching up of a sort of truce between them. They are a very ill-yoked couple, but there is hope that as they grow older they may grow less foolish and more tolerant of each other's irremediable imperfections. In this way the play comes to a fairly comfortable conclusion. It is of undue length, and especially tedious in its earlier scenes. M. Feuillet writes plays after a novelist's fashion, developing his fable very gradually, overcrowding the scene with incidents and characters, dwelling much upon detail, and deferring the excitement of interest until risk has arisen that the audience may lose patience altogether. The later passages of the story—notably the artificial quarrel over the card-table between the husband and the lover, which may have been suggested by a scene in "Esmond," and the duel in the wood—are sufficiently dramatic, however. Mr. Boucicault's translation is of a commonplace kind, and, for so experienced an author, appears to be especially deficient in terseness. The scenes affecting to be humorous do not move much mirth, although the rivalry and jealousy of the two mothers-in-law—the *Countess Chandoe* and the *Baroness de la Rivonnère*—might have proved amusing in a play depending less for success upon melodramatic expedients. The acting displayed painstaking and good intentions on the part of all concerned; still the performance of "La Tentation" in Paris must have been something very prefer-

able to the representation of "Led Astray" in London. Possibly English acting is seen almost at its worst when engaged in a work so essentially French as is this of M. Feuillet's. Miss Helen Barry as the *Countess* appears to some advantage in the lighter moods of the character, but the tragic scenes towards the close of the drama clearly overtax the actress's physical powers and her present command of her art. The *Count* is personated by Mr. Charles Thorne, who is said to have played the part with much success in America, and who now makes his first appearance upon the English stage. Mr. Thorne is without doubt an actor of force and intelligence, but his portrayal of a French nobleman is not altogether acceptable. Mr. Thorne is in full possession of all the peculiarities of American speech, and his acting is further marred by his excessive consciousness both of himself and of his audience. Still the actor impresses the spectators and fairly wins their applause in right of a certain natural vigour and heartiness which belong to him. The "creator" of the part of the *Count* was the late M. Lafont—within certain limits the most perfect actor of his time. Mr. Thorne is not by any means a Lafont, but his performance warrants expectation in regard to the other characters in his repertory. *Achille*, the friend of the family, who acts as a sort of chorus to the play, and is in truth a character very common upon the French stage, is represented by Mr. Stuart Robson, another actor from America. Mr. Robson's merits are not remarkable; he appears to be one of those unamusing low comedians who are already too numerous in our theatres.

## LXXXIV.

## "THE BELLS."

[Lyceum Theatre.—October 1874.]

MR. BATEMAN, entering upon the fourth season of his management, has reproduced the "psychological" drama of "The Bells," with, of course, the admired Mr. Irving as the representative of the guilty burgomaster Mathias. To this curious dramatic study by MM. Erckman-Chatrian, translated and modified by Mr. Leopold Lewis, the success of the Lyceum during the past three years has been much indebted, while the vitality of the work and its power to impress and attract evidently remain unimpaired. It is true that "The Bells" in a great measure charms by terrifying, and that the interest it excites is rather of a nightmare quality; it may reasonably be found by the weaker brothers among our playgoers somewhat too dreadful to be wholly entertaining; nevertheless the work possesses the rare merits of originality and completeness, while it affords signal opportunities to an actor skilled in a certain class of tragic impersonation. As *Mathias* Mr. Irving first obtained recognition for any intensity and ingenuity of histrionic method for which he had not previously received due credit. Well known as an actor of sound intelligence, of force, and even of humour, with an inclining to the order

of characters usually assumed upon the French stage by the late M. Lafont, it was as *Mathias* that Mr. Irving exhibited ability to vie with the style of acting of Frédérick Lemaitre. For *Mathias* is a part of melodrama, in right of the literalness of treatment required of the player. The burgomaster is no hero, and can claim no place in poetic tragedy. The prosaic nature of his crime is much insisted on, and it has been the object of the original authors to exhibit his punishment after the very plainest fashion. As well might poetry be looked for in the details of a post-mortem examination. *Mathias* drinks to excess the white wine of his country to steady his nerves for a while in order that he may drown care and remorse. A debauch on the eve of his daughter's wedding with *Christian*, a sergeant of gendarmes apt at bringing criminals to justice, and *Mathias* passes a most restless night, dreaming horribly. His dream, a remarkable instance of the artistic contrivance of the authors, is a strange compound of possibilities and impossibilities, fact and fiction. He fancies himself upon his trial for the murder committed fifteen years ago. Then a mesmerist he had lately seen performing at a fair appears in court, and under an exaggerated estimate of the forces of animal magnetism the criminal is constrained not merely to avow his guilt, but by an elaborate system of postures and gesticulations to represent dramatically every incident of the crime. *Mathias* awakens at last suffering the agonies of strangulation. It seems to him that the hangman's rope is already round his neck. He lives but a few moments, scarcely recognising the members of his family who have gathered about him. But his sin remains a secret. So far the murder of the Polish Jew is left unavenged. It is never known to his kindred and friends, neighbours and fellow-citizens, that their *Mathias* had been

guilty of murder. To them the criminal will be always "good Mathias;" by them his memory will be ever treasured and respected. But how severely *Mathias* has in truth suffered, the audience have been permitted to see. He has led a life of torture, and the spectacle of his agony has been presented with extraordinary force. The drama may be supposed to point the moral that sin surely entails punishment, and that men's estimates of their fellows are oftentimes fallible enough. How skilfully Mr. Irving interprets this character of *Mathias* it is not necessary again to set forth. The performance remains substantially what it was three years ago, with here and there, perhaps, some further minuteness of rendering, and a tendency to the heightening of colour, which certainly was never deficient in force. But even if offence to good taste may be occasionally risked, and if the highest qualities of histrionic art are to be denied to the representation, it yet remains an achievement rare upon the modern stage, and one of which any actor might well be proud. And in such a character, it is to be remembered, considerable license must of necessity be permitted the player. There is no prescribing exactly how much or how little an audience should be shocked, or the means that may legitimately be employed to excite and to awe. Mr. Irving's success is complete, and his command over the attention of his audience does not halt for a moment. He may fairly claim the distinction of having brought tragedy again into fashion, so far at least as the tragic exhibitions of an individual actor are concerned. A taste for old tragedy, with its long list of killed and wounded, is not perhaps to be revived. And possibly old tragedy was not so highly admired as it seemed to be. Even Dryden found occasion to observe that "in all our tragedies the audience cannot forbear laughing when the

actors are to die; 'tis the most comic part of the whole play." But that dramas with "a happy ending" are not indispensably necessary to the comfort of a modern audience the success of "The Bells" has sufficiently demonstrated. At the Lyceum a serious catastrophe once tolerated, applauded even, Mr. Irving has been allowed further ventures in the direction of tragedy. And now the plays in which he appeared assumed a more poetic complexion; at least they were composed of blank verse of a more or less musical and regular kind. To "The Bells" succeeded "Charles the First," and then followed "Eugene Aram." Mr. Irving's next essay of importance, it seems, is to be "Hamlet."

## LXXXV.

## "HAMLET."

[Lyceum Theatre.—November 1874.]

"HAMLET" has not yet shared the fate of certain of Shakespeare's other plays and been made the subject of ornate "revival:" archæology and spectacle appearing in conjunction with and deriving valuable aid from ballet-dancers, brass-bands, and what the playbills call "hosts of auxiliaries." Something of unusual embellishment the tragedy received when the late Mr. Bellew provided mute performers and scenic appliances by way of fortifying the effect of his readings of "Hamlet." There was then some searching of old authorities on the subject of architectural decoration, and care was taken that the characters should wear garments of the fashion of the tenth century. For the first time the *Ghost* entered the *Queen's* closet, not clad in a suit of mail, but with flowing robes, "his habit as he lived;" and, also for the first time, *Ophelia's* corpse was borne upon an open bier, and not confined in a coffin or shrouded with the black velvet pall of modern funerals, while certain burial rites were introduced with the singing of an antiphon, justified, it was alleged, by study of the manners and customs prevailing in the Anglo-Saxon period. Still, although there was much of the stage in this entertainment, it was not

wholly theatrical ; it was an illustrated reading—Mr. Bellew in evening dress standing between his scenes and his audience as interpreter or lecturer rather than player. Even now, when, after "months of careful preparation" and many portentous managerial announcements, "Hamlet" is produced at the Lyceum Theatre, there is found to be no particular desire to garnish the play with spangles, with needless upholstery, or with swarms of supernumeraries. The scenic decorations are reasonably appropriate, but do not pretend to be of luxurious quality : there is thriftiness, indeed, in employing the view of the churchyard in which *Eugene Aram* was wont nightly to expire in great agonies a season or two ago as the background to the representation of the interment of *Ophelia*. Nor has much inventiveness been displayed in regard to the "business" of the stage, the position of the players, or the general method of presenting the play. It is true that the omission of any actual portraits of *King Claudius* and his murdered brother from the scene of the *Queen's* closet may count as a distinct improvement, and that certain passages suppressed in the ordinary acting editions of the play have been wisely restored. But the representation of the Murder of Gonzago by torchlight is not a happy example of stage management ; nor does there seem to be any good reason why *Hamlet* should carry with him a flaming torch when he meditates the murder of his uncle at his prayers : a more likely way of informing *Claudius* of the danger threatening him could hardly have been devised. Certain conventionalisms of performance that might well have been discarded have been devoutly preserved : *Hamlet* still paces the bleak platform of the castle while clad in pumps and the thinnest of black-silk stockings, and divests himself, in the old artificial way, of his hat and cloak immediately on the appearance of the



*Ghost*, with a prescience that the warm work before him will counteract the "nipping and eager air" of night; his abandoned clothes being with ludicrous zeal collected and carried after him, from a sense that he is sure to want them later on in the play, by his friends *Horatio* and *Marcellus*.

However, it soon became clear that "Hamlet" was produced less in the hope that the tragedy might prove attractive on the score of its own merits, or that it might provide opportunities for the display of scenery and dresses, than from a conviction that some excitement would be stirred concerning Mr. Irving's representation of the leading character. The result has fully justified this belief. Although Mr. Irving has on several occasions played *Hamlet* in the provinces, he has now assumed the part for the first time in London. His performance attracted a very large audience, and, it may be said at once, secured every evidence of complete success. Mr. Irving was applauded as though he were another Garrick; he was recalled at every opportunity, and rewarded with as many crowns of laurel wreaths and bouquets of flowers as though he had been Mdme. Patti herself. This enthusiasm was no doubt excessive, but it may not be condemned as spurious, although certainly containing a suspicious element. Mr. Irving's *Hamlet* is the conscientious effort of an intelligent and experienced player, and presents just claims to respectful consideration and a fair measure of approval. It seemed, however, that the audience were predisposed to form an exaggerated estimate of the merits of the performance. In truth, the difficulty of winning favour in such a part as *Hamlet* is less great than is generally supposed. The character is well known among players to be secure of applause to any representative possessed of certain physical qualifications, some knowledge of the stage, and thorough

acquaintance with the words of the play. Indeed, it is difficult to call to mind any representation of "Hamlet" which did not elicit an abundance of applause for its leading player: the actor of *Hamlet* is so helped by the nature of the speeches he is charged to deliver, by the incidents in which he takes part as the central figure, by the support he receives of necessity from the other characters, even when these are but indifferently personated. Mr. Irving, who invariably acts with extreme painstaking, was not likely to play *Hamlet* without careful study of the text. His rendering of the part, however, does not, perhaps could not, differ much from that adopted by preceding *Hamlets*. Such change of aspect as the part assumes is mainly to be attributed to the marked physical qualities of the actor. Some few new readings he has adopted, and here and there he has varied the traditional business of the scene; but substantially his *Hamlet* is the ordinary *Hamlet* of the stage, supplemented by the peculiarities of manner of his latest representative. A marked manner, it may be noted, has been possessed by every actor of distinction, and no charge can therefore be levelled against Mr. Irving on this account. Still, a certain heaviness of movement, an occasional subsidence of interest which marked the progress of the performance, may be accounted for by Mr. Irving's limited compass of voice and lack of strength to sustain fully so arduous a character. Mr. Irving is far from a robust *Hamlet*, and is not one of those tragedians skilled in rumbling out soliloquies in deep chest notes. His voice seems sometimes artificially treble in quality and to be jerked out with effort. His movements are angular, and his bearing is deficient in dignity and courtliness, though not without a certain refinement of its own. There are artistic qualities in the representation, indeed, which are

not to be denied ; and if Mr. Irving scarcely impresses us so completely as did some earlier interpreters, he yet rarely fails to interest, and but for an unfortunate choice of costume of a strangely docked and confined kind, might always present a picturesque appearance upon the scene. In any case, for those who care to see "Hamlet" played at all, here is a *Hamlet* who is always zealous and thoughtful ; often very adroit ; who spares no pains to please ; who has at command a certain feverish impetuosity, which, if it makes his passion sometimes too petulant, is yet surprisingly effective on the stage ; and who is, in short, as complete a representative of the part as the modern theatre can furnish.

LXXXVI.

"THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR."

[Gaiety Theatre.—December 1874.]

SINCE the late Mr. Bartley withdrew from the stage in 1852, Mr. Phelps has remained in undisputed possession of the part of *Sir John Falstaff*. He has appeared, however, more frequently as the *Falstaff* of the First Part of "King Henry the Fourth" than in the less attractive Falstaff of "The Merry Wives of Windsor." Indeed, as an acting play, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" can scarcely be well known to our playgoers of to-day. It has been seldom seen since its performance for some five-and-twenty nights in 1851, during Mr. Charles Kean's management of the Princess's Theatre, when the *Falstaff* of Bartley was supported by the *Ford* of Mr. Kean, the *Mrs. Ford* of Mrs. Kean, the *Mrs. Page* of Mrs. Keeley, the *Pistol* of Mr. Ryder, and the *Slender* of Harley. At this time, too, Mr. Keeley appeared as *Sir Hugh Evans*, Mr. Wigan as *Dr. Caius*, and Mr. Meadows as *Slender*. All the musical embellishments which had been engrafted upon the comedy in the course of its conversion into an opera by Reynolds in 1824 were now discarded; it was decided that the poet's text should be strictly respected, and the work presented in its integrity. For not only has "The Merry Wives of Windsor" been

treated formally as a libretto by the composers Nicolai and Balfe; it was scarcely ever performed between 1824 and 1851 without musical interruptions and interpolations by Bishop and others. Reynolds, who had previously manipulated "The Comedy of Errors," "Twelfth Night," and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" to suit the requirements of composer and vocalists, did not hesitate to deal in like fashion with "The Merry Wives of Windsor." The parts of *Mrs. Ford* and *Mrs. Page* were accordingly assigned to singers such as Miss Stephens, Miss Cubitt, or Mdme. Vestris, with liberty to halt the action of the play every now and then when it seemed good to them to execute "I know a bank" or some such melody; for the introduced songs were invariably fitted to words culled somewhere or other from Shakspeare. So, too, the great Mr. Braham appeared as *Master Fenton*, a part having about it something of the "walking gentleman" quality that is dear to tenors, and in the midst of his wooing of *Anne Page*, with almost imbecile irrelevancy, treated the audience to "Blow, blow, thou winter wind" and other songs. It was Reynolds's excuse that but for his alterations, which he held to be "advantageous to the managers and without injury to the immortal bard," the comedies in question would not have been represented at all. A more worthy conviction now prevails, however, and it is felt on all hands that Shakspeare must no longer be made "an excuse for a song," to employ *Charles Surface's* phrase. It is sufficient that the poet should be occasionally regarded as an excuse for "correct costumes" and "spectacle;" but even when that happens, care is now taken that the original text shall be unalloyed, and that a fair measure of respect shall be paid to the intentions of the dramatist.

The revival of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" at the

Gaiety Theatre is altogether of a creditable kind. As a rule applause is sought only on the score that the management has provided as complete a representation of the comedy as the existing condition of the stage will admit of. Otherwise Shakspeare's play is left to speak for itself. It is true that Mr. Arthur Sullivan has added music of a tuneful and vivacious character to the closing scene of the comedy, when *Falstaff* is plagued and pinched by the children disguised as fairies; but here an orchestral accompaniment is almost indispensable except in the judgment of those who would be more precisely Shakspearian than Shakspeare himself. Indeed, the only serious attempt at enrichment of the text incurred, curiously enough, the decided displeasure of the audience. By way of substitute for *Anne Page's* canzonet, "Fie on sinful fantasy," a new song is introduced, "Love laid his sleepy head on a thorny rosy bed," the words being written by Mr. Swinburne and the music composed by Mr. Sullivan. But the song is a superfluity which may well be suppressed in future performances of the comedy. Generally, the success of the representation was quite beyond question. The scenic decorations are liberal and tasteful enough, and the landscape exhibiting Herne's Oak and the panoramic view of Windsor Forest is a good example of modern painting for theatrical purposes. Still, no attempt is made throughout the performance to gratify the eye at the expense of the other senses. A company of more than average strength has been engaged, and pains have been taken to secure adequate representation of every character in the long list of *dramatis personæ*. If now and then the attention of the audience seemed to abate in some measure, allowance must be made for the nature of the entertainment set before them. The comedy wears, perhaps, a more antiquated air than other of the

comedies of Shakspeare ; its humour depending more than ordinarily upon foibles of manner that depart almost with the age that saw their birth. Usually, indeed, comedies should enjoy briefer life than tragedies, for the former relate to matters of temporary interest and ludicrousness, while the latter possess pathetic qualities that should endure so long as fellow-feeling lasts. But the archaic character of certain of its scenes notwithstanding, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" affords unbounded satisfaction to an audience composed, as the Gaiety audience seemed to be in great part, of those unversed in the subject of the play. The vigorous humour of its character and the practical drollery of its incidents stirred much laughter and won cordial applause. Of the *Falstaff* of Mr. Phelps it is perhaps needless to say much. The veteran actor's performance is now what it has been for many years past. Something it lacks no doubt, not so much of humour as of geniality and jovialness. Perhaps *Falstaff* can only be represented thoroughly by one whose corpulence is due to nature rather than to art, although the author of the "Curiosities of Literature" has noted that the Falstaffs of the early stage were not nearly so stuffed and wadded as the Falstaffs of later times. The spectators of Elizabethan times could perhaps supply from their imaginations the necessary amount of corpulence as readily as they could suppose the stage furnished with scenery and other adornments. Still, Mr. Phelps's *Falstaff*, if now and then over-sententious in manner and inclined to a deliberateness of elocution that is wearisome to the ear, well merits the applause it obtains, in right of its vigour, incisiveness, and complete mastery of the text. Among the other performers well entitled to approbation may be mentioned Mr. Arthur Cecil, whose performance of *Dr. Caius* is of singular animation and humour ; Mrs. Wood,

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whose *Mrs. Page* is distinguished by an admirable delivery of the dialogue and keen perception of the fun of the situations in which she appears; and Mr. Vezin, who plays *Master Ford* with rare spirit and intelligence—if with an eye to Mr. Charles Kean's method of interpreting the character. Mr. Belford is an efficient *Mr. Page*; Mr. Maclean personates *Justice Shallow*, and Mr. J. G. Taylor spares no pains to invest the part of *Slender* with the humour that is its due.



## LXXXVII.

## "THE DREAM AT SEA."

[Adelphi Theatre.—January 1875.]'

GEOFFROY, the French critic, has defined melodrama to be "an opera in prose, which is not sung, but merely spoken, and in which music discharges the duty of a valet-de-chambre, her office being simply to announce the actors to the audience." The production of melodrama in England seems to have been due, however, rather to accident than to design, and without any very clear conception of the nature and constitution of the matter in question. It is true that Holcroft's "Tale of Mystery," an adaptation from the French, supplied with music by Dr. Busby, and produced at Covent Garden in 1802, has been usually accounted the first work of the class ever performed in this country; but plays with musical accompaniments had long before been familiar to our minor theatres as a means of evading the restrictions imposed upon them to the advantage of the patent houses. The regular spoken drama could be exhibited only at Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket during the summer months; but it was somehow established that "burlettas" could be presented upon any stage licensed by the magistrates for entertainments of music and dancing. No care was taken, however, to define

in what a burletta really consisted ; it was soon manifest that its etymological connection with the word burlesque was not by any means to be insisted upon ; and presently under the pretext of performing burlettas every kind of theatrical entertainment was produced—from "Macbeth" down to "Tom and Jerry." And especially was the term employed to cover productions which could only properly be described as melodramas. At the Adelphi Theatre, indeed, which, from the first opening of its doors in 1802 down to the present time, has always been famed for its performances of this character, the managers sometimes, in their endeavour to combine accuracy of description with regard for legality, resorted to rather complicated announcements. Thus Mr. Fitzball's "Pilot"—an adaptation to the stage of Fenimore Cooper's novel—was described in the playbills of the time as "a nautical melodramatic burletta." But usually, until the abolition of the privileges enjoyed by the patent theatres rendered further employment of the term altogether needless, "burletta" was the general title applied to every play performed at a minor house ; and it was, accordingly, as a burletta that Mr. Buckstone's "Dream at Sea" forty years ago made its first appearance upon the stage. Upon its recent revival at the Adelphi Theatre, however, with a view to the gratification of the playgoers of to-day, the "Dream at Sea" is properly described as a melodrama ; and, indeed, it is a melodrama of a very uncompromising kind. Whether the disinterment of the work was altogether an expedient proceeding is a question perhaps concerning the manager of the theatre more than any one else ; but, at least, it may be stated that the performance of the "Dream at Sea" is of interest chiefly to theatrical antiquaries. There is something possibly in the nature of melodramas that compels them to grow old with greater

rapidity than plays of a more sober character; the time arrives when situations cease to thrill and effects no longer startle as once they did, and over the whole work there descends like a pall or a wet blanket a sense of its infirmity and decay. In some way it would seem as though the spectators had been behind the scenes of these old-fashioned productions, noting the clumsiness of their artifices, the poverty of their cunning, and the thinness of their disguises. And then modern burlesque has made serious havoc of by-gone melodrama. There is lack of faith in the audience, who will no longer connive at their own delusion and excitement; while the players are dispirited by the futility of their attempts to conjure with contrivances long since exploded and found out. Nevertheless the story serving as the foundation of the "Dream at Sea" is not deficient in certain romantic and dramatic qualities. A sailor lover, one *Launce Linwood*, dreams while at sea—the dream being simply narrated, not exhibited, in the form of a vision—that his mistress, *Anne Trevanion*, has been in peril of her life. He hastens home—the scene of the story being laid upon the coast of Cornwall—to learn that *Anne Trevanion* has really been murdered. In her lover's absence it seems *Anne* has been compelled by her father—one of those imperious parents who have always abounded in the theatre—to accept the suit of his nephew, *Richard Penderall*. A ball has been given in celebration of the forthcoming marriage; Sir Roger de Coverley has been danced, and the healths of the affianced couple have been formally toasted. But one *Black Ralph*, a wrecker, has intruded upon the festivities in quest of plunder, with the excuse that he aims at providing his family with bread. Suddenly encountering *Anne Trevanion*, *Black Ralph* has felled her to the ground. He effects his escape, and seeing that while attacking her he

had chanced to wear the cloak of her lover, suspicion falls upon *Launce Linwood*, who is indeed formally accused of the murder, to which it is supposed he has been prompted by jealousy. *Anne Trevanion* is buried in the village church on the cliffs; but soon it is made evident that she has been buried alive. *Launce Linwood*, animated by a desire to contemplate once more the face of his beloved, digs up the body; when lo! she sits up in her coffin, and finally addresses her lover by his Christian name. Of course when this incident is reached the end of the story is in sight. The true lovers are made happy, and *Black Ralph* saves trouble by perishing of an exceptional kind of remorse. He frankly avows that in the way of his business as a wrecker he has knocked many a man on the head without suffering any inconvenience afterwards from that summary mode of dealing with his fellow-creatures; the murder of *Anne Trevanion*, however—for he believes himself guilty of no less a crime—is something more than even his robust conscience can digest and dispose of, and consequently he expires. These serious events are intermingled with comic incidents, which have lost somehow the power of moving laughter in any great degree. The usual soubrette is present throughout the play—linked to its interest by the fact that she is the foster-sister of the heroine—and is furnished with a lover, the muffin man of her native village. A third comic character is an overseer and tax-collector, who meets with many misadventures, and incurs much derision from the other *dramatis personæ*, but whose humour, generally considered, is certainly of a cheerless kind. The players spare no exertions to give life to the drama, and the *Launce Linwood* of Mr. Fernandez, the *Biddy Nutts* of Miss Hudspeth, and the *Tommy Tinkle* of Mr. Fawn—a spirited low comedian from the Surrey Theatre—meet with considerable

applause. But, upon the whole, the "Dream at Sea" must be said to be but an inferior production, feebly written, constructed with little art, and interesting only to those playgoers who care to make acquaintance with a work which enjoyed great favour forty years ago.

their suffering and poverty, the bonnet is the sower of much mortification. But it is soon explained that this unlucky article of dress belongs in truth to *Talbot Champneys'* aunt, *Miss Champneys*, an elderly lady, whose only apparent mission in the drama is to bring about this rather unpleasant imbroglio towards its close. The fathers are then reunited to their boys, to whose marriage with the partners of their choice all opposition terminates, and the curtain descends upon a scene of affectionate congratulation and rejoicing.

"Our Boys," in common with other of Mr. Byron's works, is unduly leavened with farce, and can boast little correspondence with nature and reality. There is no good reason for the constant companionship of such antipathetic characters as *Sir Geoffry* and *Perkyn Middlewick*, while the violence of the latter in discarding his son simply because he would marry an heiress who has spoken disrespectfully of the butter trade, is very unintelligible. The characters are not new to the stage, with the exception perhaps of *Talbot Champneys*, who, his educational advantages notwithstanding, appears to be a curious combination of the "cub" and the fop, until love and misfortune stir within him generous sentiments, and develop the worthiness of his real nature. The part is played with genuine art by Mr. Thorne, who delivers a few pathetic lines in the closing scene with a discreet ingenuity worthy of high praise. But, with many defects, "Our Boys" possesses advantages which ensure for the work the favour of the audience. It is amusing from first to last; there is hardly, indeed, a dull minute in the course of the play, which abounds in animation, movement, and intrigue, if it excites no interest of a sentimental kind; while the dialogue is of Mr. Byron's best, each character talking like a professional jester bound at all costs to educe laughter from his auditors. The last act of the

comedy is the least to be commended, for here a distasteful element is introduced, and there is interruption to the good-humoured flow of the narrative ; or perhaps it should rather be said that amusement is excited by inharmonious and injudicious means. *Mr. Middlewick*, the butterman, personated with sound, strong humour by Mr. David James, soon secured for himself the warm approval of the audience, who greeted his drollery of aspect and bearing, his ill-treatment of his native language, and his constant allusion to the wares that formerly constituted his stock in trade, with incessant laughter. *Mr. Middlewick*, indeed, will probably take rank among the most popular creations and personages of the modern stage. Mr. Farren imparts a certain distinction to the rather shadowy character of *Sir Geoffry*, and Mr. Warner is a competent representative of *Charles Middlewick*. The ladies of the play are not invested with much dramatic importance, and can scarcely rise above a commonplace level. Miss Bishop portrays efficiently the more sentimental *Violet*, and Miss Roselle gives the needful measure of grace and vivacity to *Mary Melrose*, who has inclinations in the direction of coquetry.

LXXXIX.

"A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM."

[Gaiety Theatre.—February 1875.]

"A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM" has been reproduced for the sake of Mr. Phelps, whose representation of the character of *Bottom the Weaver* first won popularity at Sadler's Wells in 1853. Indeed, since the death of the comedian Harley in 1858 the part has remained the undisputed possession of Mr. Phelps, and upon every subsequent revival of the play he has renewed his successes as *Bully Bottom*. Care has been taken, however, to render the performance at the Gaiety as complete as possible in every respect; the scenic embellishments leave little to be desired, and the musical accompaniments, without which the work could hardly be presented to the playgoers of to-day, are, upon the whole, very well executed. It has been the fate of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to be repeatedly viewed almost as the libretto of an opera. It was produced under the title of "The Fairy Queen" at the Theatre Royal in 1692, with the addition of numerous songs, dances, and mechanical effects. "The Court and town," records a critic of the time, "were much satisfied with 'The Fairy Queen,' but the expense attending it was so great that the company got very little by it." In 1716, Leveridge, a bass



singer, who has been credited with the composition of the words and tune of the "Roast Beef of Old England," the air of Gay's ballad of "Black-eyed Susan," and the "Macbeth" music usually ascribed to Locke, derived from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" a masque entitled "Pyramus and Thisbe," which in 1745 became a sort of comic opera with music supplied by John Frederick Lampe. Ten years later Garrick, summoning to his aid certain Italian singers, presented the play in a mutilated form as "The Fairies." Colman tried a similar experiment in 1763, when the work was performed with the addition of some thirty songs and the suppression of great part of the mock tragedy of "Pyramus and Thisbe." Bishop's music was composed for the version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" prepared by Frederick Reynolds for performance at Covent Garden in 1816, and has since been rarely separated from the play. Mendelssohn's famous overture was first published in 1826; the composer's arrangement of the play, in accordance with the desire expressed by Tieck, with additional music, being first performed on the 14th of October 1843, at the New Palace at Potsdam, and repeated a few days afterwards at the Berlin theatre. Shakspeare's text was first respected and restored to the stage by Mdme. Vestris, when she revived "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with a strong caste and very splendid accessories at Covent Garden Theatre some five-and-thirty years ago. The lady's good example, has been followed by all managers who have subsequently ventured to represent the play.

Of necessity the conditions of theatrical performance, even when these have been controlled to the utmost by discretion and ingenuity, are fatal to the grace and delicacy of such a poem as "A Midsummer Night's Dream." It was after witnessing a representation of "The Tempest"

that Hazlitt declared his unwillingness to witness again any theatrical exhibition of a play of Shakspeare's, and suggested doubt whether all stage renderings of the poet did not result to his injury. The shadows and spirits of Shakspeare, the creatures of his fancy, pertaining to a world of dreams and visions, can meet with but very gross interpretation at the hands of ordinary flesh and blood. In the theatre, fairies, however described by the dramatist as capable of creeping into acorn cups and hanging dewdrops in the ears of cowslips, must be embodied and portrayed by ballet girls more or less muscular and agile, and as little like spiritual creatures as well can be. *Oberon* and *Titania* must find representatives in ladies able to do justice to Bishop's music ; and the part of "that shrewd and knavish sprite" *Puck* can but be allotted to a youthful performer of the female sex, skilled in posture-making, lively of gesture, and unhesitating as to revelation of form. On these accounts "A Midsummer Night's Dream" might fairly be dismissed from the catalogue of acting plays ; and probably every student of Shakspeare would assent to its being thus relieved of liability of a histrionic kind. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that the play was certainly written for performance in the theatre, and at a time when scenic illusion and stage artifice depended almost entirely upon the imagination of the spectators ; when boys personated the fairies and other female characters in the drama, and hangings of tapestry did duty for painted scenes. To a modern audience the play is reduced almost to the level of a fairy spectacle of commonplace quality ; the poetry of the subject lies hidden under stage carpentry or evaporates as a subtle and volatile ether in the process of transfer from the library to the stage. No doubt the numberless exquisite passages in the play would not fail in their power to charm if only reasonable

competency were entrusted with their delivery. But elocution is one of the neglected arts of the modern stage. In ordinary cases it perhaps does not greatly signify how much or how little the auditor misses of his author; but it is certainly hard that lines and speeches of exceeding beauty and value should be muttered rather than uttered with the haste and unintelligence of a schoolboy hurrying over the recital of a lesson. Still, it may be said that this representation at the Gaiety is of a meritorious kind, the condition of the modern stage being borne in mind. Indeed, the play could scarcely have been so efficiently represented at any other London theatre. Of Mr. Phelps's performance of the part of *Bottom* it is needless to say much. It is exactly now what it was twenty years ago: over-elaborate and over-deliberate, grotesque rather than humorous, needlessly repulsive, yet abounding in force, and well entitled to the distinction of originality and novelty of conception. Mr. Phelps is well supported by Mr. Lyall as *Quince* and Mr. Righton as *Flute*. The characters of *Oberon* and *Titania* are creditably sustained by Miss Loseby and Miss Ritta; while Miss Pratt renders important aid as the first fairy, who is entrusted with so large a share of the musical illustrations of the play. Miss Helen Douglas plays *Hermia* with grace and intelligence, if with insufficient force; the lovers *Lysander* and *Demetrius* being represented by Mr. Robertson and Mr. Charles Creswick. *Puck* is performed with much vivacity by Miss West; the songs connected with the part being entrusted, inexplicably enough, to the tenor and bass singers, Messrs. Cotte and Ledwidge.

LXXXIX.

"AS YOU LIKE IT."

[Opera Comique Theatre.—February 1875.]

WHEN, after the reopening of the theatres at the Restoration, the plays of Shakspeare gradually found their way back to the stage, they wore usually a changed and ill-treated look. They were in the condition of straggling and wounded soldiers rejoining the main body of their comrades at the close of a severe engagement. They had been condemned by the Puritans, and they were now to suffer violence at the hands of the adapters, who accounted Shakspeare's writings to be but rough-hewn material which they were at liberty to shape anew, so that the taste of a later public might be the better suited. The delightful pastoral of "As You Like It" underwent specially cruel treatment of this kind. Until 1723 it had escaped notice; then a certain Mr. Charles Johnson took it in hand, with a view to rearranging it for theatrical exhibition. He is described in biographical records as the author of a score of tragedies, comedies, and farces—coarsely garbled versions, for the most part, of plays by Shakspeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Cowley, Shirley, and others; a portly, pleasant gentleman, "famous," states an authority, "for writing a play every year and being at Button's every day." He had married a

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young widow with a fortune, and had further prospered as a tavern-keeper in Bow Street. His mangled and mutilated edition of "As You Like It" was called "Love in a Forest," and was played at Drury Lane, the actors Booth, Wilks, and Theophilus Cibber being included in the cast. The characters of *Touchstone*, *Audrey*, *William*, *Corin*, *Phæbe*, and *Sylvius*, Mr. Johnson thought it expedient to suppress altogether. He added little matter of his own originating, but what with transpositions and interpolations from other plays, he converted the comedy into a sort of Shakspearian patchwork. The wrestling match he changed to a knightly combat in the lists. *Charles* accuses *Orlando* of treason, and the speeches from "Richard the Second" relative to the quarrel between Norfolk and Bolingbroke are introduced. *Jaques* is supposed to be the lover of *Celia*, and is allowed to borrow freely from the sallies of *Benedick* in "Much Ado About Nothing;" while *Rosalind* is intrusted with *Viola's* descriptive passage, "She never told her love," from "Twelfth Night." One of the soliloquies of *Jaques* is composed of scraps from *Benedick* and *Touchstone*, with certain feeble essays of Mr. Johnson's muse employed in the way of connecting links. In the last act the mock play of "Pyramus and Thisbe" from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is introduced, or rather dragged in, and the comedy concludes with the happy union of *Rosalind* and *Orlando* and of *Jaques* and *Celia*, the original epilogue being omitted. "Love in a Forest" enjoyed representation upon some half-dozen occasions, and was then finally abandoned. "As You Like It," in accordance with the poet's text, was first restored to the theatre in 1740, and has since held a firm position in the list of acting plays; in part, no doubt, because of its own supreme merits and the public recognition these have obtained, but also in part because to every

actress of distinction the character of *Rosalind* offers irresistible temptations. It has been sustained by Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Woffington, Mrs. Jordan, and Mrs. Siddons, to name no more ; the interpreters of tragedy and comedy having alike included it in their repertory, viewing the part as a sort of neutral ground, independent of professional classification, and open only to the most able and accomplished. In truth, *Rosalind* is not to be described as tragic at all ; yet the romance, the sentiment, the tenderness of the character commend it to the actresses of tragedy, while its sportiveness, its wit, its archness, always subject it to the claim of those comedy actresses who are not content merely to provoke laughter. No doubt the doublet and hose of *Ganymede* have been considered as hindrances by certain artists ; Miss O'Neil, indeed, on this account shunned the part altogether, while, for like reasons, Mrs. Siddons, who first played *Rosalind* on the occasion of her benefit in 1787, took refuge in a costume of very strange device. As her friend Miss Seward wrote, "Her dress was injudicious. The scrupulous prudery of decency produced an ambiguous vestment that seemed neither male nor female." Altogether, the great actress failed as *Rosalind* ; her performance was found to be "totally without archness ;" for once in her career she was destined to see a character she had appropriated wrested from her. A far more admired and successful *Rosalind* was found in Mrs. Jordan. Campbell the poet, who wrote a laudatory memoir of Mrs. Siddons, was yet moved to declare that Shakspeare himself, if he had been a living spectator, would surely have gone behind the scenes to compliment the *Rosalind* of Mrs. Jordan.

The revival of "As You Like It" at the Opera Comique, although the performance has something about it of an impromptu air, is of interest in its way, and well entitled

to public regard. Four of the more prominent of the *dramatis personæ* are, at any rate, creditably sustained; while there is no lack of good intention and painstaking in the representation of the subordinate characters. From the *Rosalind* of Mrs. Kendal certain poetic qualities may be missing; the lady's artifice is oftentimes too obvious, and she is apt to be over-conscious both of herself and of her audience. Nevertheless, her performance charms in right of its grace, its frank vivacity, its bright intelligence, and what Coleridge would call its "femineity." Mrs. Kendal's best acting is in the forest scenes, her first act being decidedly inferior. Throughout the play she obtains valuable support from the alert manliness of Mr. Kendal's *Orlando*. Mr. Cecil displays genuine humour and originality as *Touchstone*, although breadth may be absent from his method of portraying the character. It is something, however, to hear such appreciative and skilful utterance of Shakspearian wit. *Jaques*, a part that has usually proved acceptable to actors of tragedy—for, if avoided by Garrick, Kemble, and Kean, it can count among its interpreters such famous performers as Booth, Quin, Barry, Sheridan, and Macready—is allotted at the Opera Comique to Mr. Hermann Vezin, an artist enjoying a just reputation for the good taste and expertness he has manifested in his every theatrical assumption. Mr. Vezin wins well-deserved applause by his elocutionary adroitness in dealing with the long speeches of *Jaques*. Among these, however, it is to be regretted that stage custom has authorised the inclusion of the First Lord's description of *Jaques* himself, and his moralising upon the wounded stag. Nor, although also supported by custom, can *Rosalind's* borrowing of the "cuckoo song," from "Love's Labour's Lost" be permitted to pass without rebuke.

XC.

"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—April 1875.]

AN attempt to represent Shakspeare's play of "The Merchant of Venice" at the Prince of Wales's Theatre has been attended with only partial success. Probably the experiment was undertaken rather to surprise than to content the public. For some years the theatre has been devoted to the performance of dramas having little in them of passion or romance, and thus a school of acting has been established excellent in its rendering of the prose, the affectation, the languor, and the drawling undemonstrativeness of modern life and fashion, but peculiarly unsuited to present histrionic exhibitions of a loftier and more heroic nature. Shakspeare, for the adequate interpretation of his works upon the stage, needs the services of players who can show strong feeling, and deliver his language with art and force. No doubt it is well now and then to study his creations from new points of view, and especially to examine whether traditional and long-accepted methods of performance, however they may seem to be the result of experience and judgment, are not, in truth, mere artifices and mannerisms of the players of the past. But efforts to subdue the poet to the tameness of modern life, to reduce



his sustained speeches to disjointed chat, and to impart to his plays generally an air of the boudoir or the drawing-room, could scarcely satisfy even the audiences of to-day, who are certainly, as a rule, to be entertained upon very easy terms. Fortunately for the performance of "The Merchant of Venice" at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, the cast includes a young actress who has but now joined the company, and who brings to her impersonation of *Portia* sounder and safer views as to the due rendering of the poetic drama. Miss Ellen Terry, who in her early childhood served an apprenticeship at the Princess's Theatre under the rule of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean, is now an artist of real distinction. With all the charms of aspect and graces of manner indispensable to the impersonation of the heiress of Belmont, Miss Terry is gifted with a voice of silvery and sympathetic tone, while her elocutionary method should be prized by her fellow-actors. *Portia* has been presented now with tragedy-queen airs, and now with vivacity of the soubrette sort—as when in Garrick's time Mrs. Clive played the part and made a point of mimicking the more famous barristers of her time; indeed, a nice combination of stateliness, animation, sentiment, archness, poetry, tenderness, and humour is required of the actress intrusted with the character. Miss Terry's *Portia* leaves little to be desired; she is singularly skilled in the business of the scene, and assists the action of the drama by great care and inventiveness in regard to details. There is something of passion in the anxiety with which she watches *Bassanio's* choice of the leaden casket; while the confession of her love which follows upon that incident is delivered with a depth of feeling such as only a mistress of her art could accomplish. Thus it chanced that, probably for the first time, the portions of the play that relate to the

loves of *Portia* and *Bassanio* became of more importance and interest than the scenes in which *Shylock* appears. Mr. Coghlan has proved himself on frequent occasions an actor of intelligence, and his opinions touching the character of *Shylock*, if he could but express them clearly, might possibly be of a valuable kind. But the result of his performance is to reduce *Shylock* to quite a subordinate position in the drama. The early actors of the eighteenth century were apt to treat the character as one pertaining to comedy if not to farce; *Shylock* was to them a ludicrous Jew, wearing a red beard and otherwise of very grotesque appearance. Macklin first restored Shakspeare's Jew to the stage, and his treatment of the part has been adopted more or less by all subsequent performers. With the single exception of Garrick, every English tragedian pretending to fame has undertaken the character at some period of his professional career. And it is not clear that *Shylock* is susceptible of much variety of interpretation. He appears in but three scenes of importance, and is described by Hazlitt as "a man brooding over one idea, that of his wrongs, and bent on one unalterable purpose, that of revenge." By accident or by intention, Mr. Coghlan makes *Shylock* a man of indistinct character, weak and irresolute of mind, assuming at times a certain hard vehemence of action under which no genuine passion lies, but generally mild of demeanour and slow of speech, much addicted to muttering, and incapable of investing his utterances with anything like incisiveness of tone or pungency of sarcasm. It was something strange to hear *Shylock's* quick irony and bitter retort, his fierce vindictiveness and grand bursts of passion, in which, nevertheless, a curious vein of pathos and plaintiveness is to be discerned, all delivered in the same dreary monotone, the blank verse broken up into

prose, and the scene generally disturbed by long pauses and imperfect management of the voice. Of course such a *Shylock* could scarcely stir or impress, and he left his audience at last more apathetic than he found them. If admiration is to be won by the performance, it must be solely on the score of its novelty; it is certainly most unlike any preceding representation of *Shylock*. Miss Carlotta Addison is a satisfactory *Nerissa*, Mr. Archer a respectable *Antonio*, and Mr. Bancroft imparts some importance to the *Prince of Morocco*, who, with his rival, the *Prince of Arragon*, is restored to the stage from which "acting editions" have usually banished him. The *Bassanio* lacked dignity of bearing, and the *Gratiano* was too laboriously humorous to amuse. The reception of the representation was not wholly cordial, the spectators at times manifesting impatience and disappointment. Interest, however, attaches to the production because of its *Portia* and the pictures, at once brilliant and careful, of Venetian life in the sixteenth century which occupy the stage. Mr. Gordon's scenery is so admirably painted and contrived that the small space at the command of the performers is never perceived as a defect; the costumes and accessories are remarkable for their picturesqueness not less than for their richness and appropriateness. Since Mr. Kean, in 1858, converted the play into a pageant and a spectacle, "The Merchant of Venice" has not been so handsomely cared for by upholsterers, dressmakers, scene-painters, and "property" manufacturers.

XCI.

"MONEY."

[The Prince of Wales's Theatre.—June 1875.]

LORD LYTTON'S "Money," although during its thirty-five years of existence it has been subjected to very considerable wear and tear, yet remains in full possession of its force and effectiveness as an acting play. In truth, the work could hardly exhibit signs of fading or decay as a picture of life and manners, for in advantages of that kind it was particularly deficient from the first, insomuch that its earliest critics promptly condemned it as a farce enriched with a serious part for Mr. Macready. Lord Lytton, however, if careless as to the strict conditions of legitimate comedy, was skilled in the arts of pleasing a general audience and of providing capital opportunities for histrionic display. He had the support, moreover, of a very strong company, of which but three members of any note now survive—the original representatives of *Sir Frederick Blount*, *Georgina Vesey*, and *Clara Douglas*. The story of the play is in itself trifling enough, and is not set forth with any special art, its main interest and the happiness of the hero depending upon his discovery of the fact that a bank-note for £5 had been sent to his old nurse *Mrs. Staunton*—who throughout remains invisible to the audience—not, as he had

been led to imagine, by *Miss Georgina Vesey*, but by *Miss Clara Douglas*. Still, such well-contrived scenes as the reading of old *Mordaunt's* will to his kindred, and the gambling at the club-house, would almost be sufficient to account for the success of the play, while the writing is throughout vigorous and adroit, if the speeches delivered by *Evelyn* seem occasionally adapted rather for the lecture-room than the stage. In favour of *Evelyn* himself there is little to be said. He is not so unprincipled as Lord Lytton's other stage hero, *Claude Melnotte*, and yet he is by no means so interesting or so picturesque. He is intensely vain, self-conscious, peevish, and capable of very ill-behaviour, as when, in the presence of *Clara*, who has rejected him, and for the express purpose of wounding her, he offers his hand and heart to *Georgina*. It is not surprising that Macready accepted with reluctance the part his friend the dramatist had written for him, although the "doubt and misgiving" of which the tragedian makes confession related less to the moral nature of *Evelyn* than to the value of the character for stage purposes. "I have nothing great or striking in situation, character, humour, or passion to develop," Macready records in his diary, with a hint of his fear that *Evelyn* would be subordinated in public opinion to the characters of *Sir John Vesey*, *Mr. Graves*, and *Clara Douglas*. Even during the first success of the comedy the actor maintained that *Evelyn* was an "ineffective, inferior part." Nevertheless, Macready's *Evelyn* was invariably well received by the audience, and contributed in no small degree to the favour which "Money" enjoyed during its first season. It is true that the tragedian was rather a mature-looking hero in 1840, for he was then nearly fifty; but in regard to personal graces and matters of costume he had sought the valuable aid of Count D'Orsay, whose

counsels were also of service in the stage management of the club-scene ; and the public of that date was accustomed to and even relished long speeches, however inclined to be of a stilted and inflated nature, when delivered with the elocutionary art and the earnestness which Macready had invariably at command. Nowadays it must be confessed that *Evelyn* seems to be a somewhat tedious and oppressive personage, obtaining but an inferior measure of sympathy and respect from the audience. Mr. Coghlan, however, spares no effort in his impersonation of the character, plays throughout dexterously, and is careful to regard the probabilities of tone and gesture in delivering the numerous diatribes and sallies with which *Evelyn* is intrusted. In other respects the play is well represented at the Prince of Wales's, albeit the cast of characters has undergone some deterioration as compared with the performance of two seasons back. Miss Marie Wilton was so admirable a *Georgina Vesey* that it is to be regretted she should now relinquish that part to appear as *Lady Franklin*, a character originally sustained by Mrs. Glover. Widows upon the stage have long been divided into two classes : widows young, graceful, and sparkling, such as appear so constantly in the comedies of M. Scribe ; and the more formidable widows, substantial of form and occasionally forbidding of aspect, such as figure considerably in old English plays. *Lady Franklin* may well be endowed with charms of person and manner, and yet the author had clearly in view a certain robustness and solidity of beauty when he first brought the character upon the scene. Indeed it now becomes necessary to alter the text to suit the existing facts of the case, and *Graves* is made to describe her ladyship as "a nice little" instead of a "monstrous fine" woman. However, there is no real reason why *Graves* should not forget his sorrows

and his "sainted Maria" at the bidding of the arch and vivacious *Lady Franklin* of Miss Marie Wilton, although he has more frequently been seen to surrender to the imposing presence and commanding airs of a *Lady Franklin* of the school of Mrs. Glover. Mr. Hare having ceased to be a member of the company, the character of *Sir John Vesey* is now undertaken by Mr. Collette, who exhibits more force than humour or finish, and does not depart much from the conventional methods of delineating the elderly gentlemen of comedy. Mr. George Honey remains in undisputed possession of the part of *Graves*, and Mr. Bancroft continues to represent *Sir Frederick Blount* as one of the most amusing of stage fops. Mr. Archer is a competent *Captain Dudley Smooth*; and the rival politicians, *Lord Glossmore* and *Stout*, are fairly depicted by Mr. Teesdale and Mr. A. Wood. In the part of *Clara Douglas*, Miss Ellen Terry displays grace and pathos, the scenes with *Evelyn* in which she rejects his suit and relates the story of her father's sorrows being skilfully and powerfully represented. *Georgina Vesey*, frivolous and foolish, yet true to her first love, *Sir Frederick*, is satisfactorily portrayed by Miss Carlotta Addison. The scenic decorations are new and unusually tasteful. Probably the elegance of a modern drawing-room has never been more completely reproduced upon the stage than by these interiors of the house now of *Sir John Vesey* and now of *Evelyn*. The club scene, always a good example of modern stage management, is represented with even increase of ingenuity and effect, and excites the liveliest demonstrations of approval.

XCII.

"MY AWFUL DAD."

[Gaiety Theatre. —September 1875.]

"MY AWFUL DAD" is, of course, a farce, and at least suggested by "the French." Mr. Mathews has justly won so much celebrity as an actor that there is a chance his exertions as an adapter may escape recollection. He is to be credited, however, with numberless dramatic trifles transferred from the Parisian stage, but very dexterously fitted for representation in English. The dialogue he delights in is recklessly facetious: all kinds of puns, odd turns of speech, and verbal quips and pleasantries are pressed into the service of his plays. He has been taught, however, by long experience of the theatre, that if he can but make his audience laugh, they are not likely to inquire too severely into the means he employs in effecting that object. It is curious that an actor whose method of performance is heedfully imitative of nature should so frequently appear in plays which cannot pretend to reflect reality with any degree of accuracy; still Mr. Mathews's farce is not that "grand grotesque of farce" of which Lamb wrote. He does not transport the spectators to a world of extravagance where characters and occurrences are not to be tested by the standards of ordinary experience; he rather by his own easy



calmness of bearing and polished manner invites faith in the irrationality of which he is so often the hero. He preserves an air of every day amid the most unfamiliar scenes and incidents, and thus seems to leaven with probability circumstances which are hardly to be viewed as possible. "My Awful Dad" will not bear grave examination; but the result in representation has probably surpassed the most sanguine expectation of the contriver of the play. The story is supposed to be of modern date, and the scene of action is laid now in the chambers of *Mr. Richard Evergreen*, a young barrister in the Temple, and now in the hall of the Sea View Hotel, Scarborough. *Mr. Adonis Evergreen*, the father of *Richard*, is the "awful dad" of the comedy. He is a spruce, sprightly gentleman of fifty, who has still a large stock of wild oats to sow; whose manners are engaging, but whose morals are lax; who outruns his income, keeps the worst of company and the latest of hours, and afflicts his son grievously by his dissolute life. In truth, *Mr. Adonis Evergreen* closely resembles in many respects the father of "Frou-frou," as interpreted by M. Ravel, who, it may be remembered, excused his recourse to hair-dye on the score of his being too disreputable to appear with grey locks. The situation of father and son is a reversal of the ordinary condition of things. The father is the prodigal; the son indignant, stern, staid, hard-working, and paymaster for his sire's liabilities. *Mr. Adonis Evergreen* has taken up his abode in his son's chambers, and brings serious discredit and demoralisation upon that establishment. He has misdirected the fidelity of the laundress and employed the barrister's three clerks in running his errands to the pawnbroker's and elsewhere. He even ventures to receive his son's clients and to tender them advice touching questions

of law; for *Mr. Richard Evergreen*, it appears, regardless of professional etiquette, is in the habit of consulting with his clients without the intervention of a solicitor. Further, this ill-regulated parent has an objectionable way of shifting responsibility from his own shoulders by producing the visiting cards of his son whenever he finds himself, as too frequently happens, involved in any considerable dilemma. The mortification of the respectable, plodding barrister is extreme, as one by one the misdeeds of the author of his being are revealed to him, and he is charged with erratic proceedings such as in his maddest moments he is quite incapable of. The play depends for success less upon any studied substantiality of plot than upon a rapid succession of funny incidents. *Mr. Adonis Evergreen*, invariably alert and good-humoured, flits through a series of quaint accidents and transactions, without failing for one moment to attach to himself the favourable opinion and the applause of his audience. No doubt much of his conduct is deserving of strenuous reprehension, but he is so convincingly the advocate and the representative of folly and frolic, that all sense of moral principle is held in suspense while he occupies the scene. In the end, the reputation of a rake which the younger *Evergreen* has acquired by means of the elder *Evergreen's* transgressions, secures for the barrister the hand of an heiress who does not desire a husband of too strait-laced a disposition. *Adonis* is also provided with a wife in *Mrs. Weddagain*, a young widow, who under the conditions of her deceased husband's will may not, without forfeiting her entire fortune, marry a second spouse who is less than fifty years of age. The lady, who had for some time lamented this restriction, is relieved of anxiety when she finds herself at liberty to bestow her hand upon so pleasant and well-preserved a

suitor as *Evergreen* the elder ; who, upon his part, his debts being all discharged by his son, promises to lead an irreproachable career in the future, and to make *Mrs. Weddagain* the very best of husbands.

Mr. Mathews is still without a rival upon the stage, and he plays the part of *Mr. Adonis Evergreen* in his happiest manner. His acting, indeed, differs little from what it has been for some years past. If here and there some decline of force or of volubility may be detected, the performance generally is surprising in its animation, humorousness, and power of entertaining. Hearty applause rewarded his efforts both as player and playwright.

XCIII.

“ALL FOR HER.”

[Mirror Theatre.—October 1875.]

MESSRS. Palgrave Simpson and Herman Merivale, the joint authors of the new drama of “All for Her,” announce in the playbills that *Hugh Trevor*, the most prominent figure in the fable, has been derived from the character of *Sydney Carton* in the “Tale of Two Cities,” with “the express permission of the late Charles Dickens.” Acknowledgment is, no doubt, due to the great novelist, for certain portions of his dialogue have been freely employed in the composition of the play, but in truth it is not so much the character of *Sydney Carton* that has been borrowed as the striking incident, towards the close of the book, of *Carton's* heroic rescue of *Evrémonde* from the prison of the Conciergerie, and subsequent death upon the scaffold in the stead of his escaped rival. *Hugh Trevor*, at the opening of the drama, is a dissolute, reckless, fallen gentleman of the Don Cæsar type, who seems to find in his own degradation some sort of vengeance for the wrongs he has suffered at the hands of society; for he is of illegitimate birth, his mother has been cruelly betrayed, and he subsists miserably upon a small pension, doled out to him by his father's lawful son, *Lord Edendale*. Further, he has to endure the bitter morti-

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fiction of knowing that the woman he loves devotedly, a certain *Lady Marsden*, a North-country heiress and beauty, is the betrothed wife of this same *Lord Edendale*. It is at the moment when he is the most maddened by drink and by jealousy that his half-brother's property and position and life are placed at his mercy. For discovery is made that the late Lord had been secretly married to *Mrs. Trevor*, the mother of *Hugh*, and that he is therefore the rightful heir to the *Edendale* title and estates; while at the same time it is disclosed that by reason of his complicity in the rising of '45, the so-called *Lord Edendale*, *Hugh's* half-brother, is liable to a traitor's doom, the officers of justice being already upon his track. The play sets forth the awakening, under these conditions, of the genuine nobility of *Hugh's* nature. The purity of his love for *Lady Marsden* redeems him from the abasement and squalor in which he had rejoiced to live; he frees himself from the malign and rancorous thoughts and passions that had once enslaved him, and gradually he mounts to heroism: like *Henry Esmond*, he foregoes his claims to legitimacy and rank, destroying the proofs of his mother's marriage, and, like *Sydney Carton*, he surrenders his life upon the scaffold to ensure the safety of his half-brother and the happiness of *Lady Marsden*.

It is, of course, upon this character of *Hugh Trevor* that the play of "All for Her" bases its appeal for applause and distinction. The story it relates is not, perhaps, essentially novel, and the catastrophe pertains to the domain of deep tragedy; moreover, an opinion prevails, amounting almost to a superstition, that a drama dealing with a Jacobite plot is necessarily bound to be unlively and lowering: an unreasonable prejudice, very cramping to the British dramatist who would employ high treason for theatrical purposes, would subject his characters to the risk of capital

punishment without involving them in forfeiture of public sympathy, but who, after '45, finds himself denied historical opportunities of the kind in question, unless he should venture to convert to the use of the stage the wretched Cato Street conspiracy. However, if "All for Her" deals with sombre matters and with incidents not absolutely new to the theatre, the drama notwithstanding possesses in an unusual degree the power of impressing and interesting a general audience. The work has been conscientiously planned and executed, and the writing is throughout of a dexterous and strenuous kind, rising occasionally to genuine eloquence and passion. Now and then, perhaps, there is a sacrifice of probability to stage exigency; something of vagueness attends upon the development of the plot; the characters seem to be influenced by inadequate motives; and an excess of narrative weighs down the dialogue. The love of *Mary Rivers*, the inn-keeper's daughter, for *Hugh Trevor* is but sketchily treated, while the sudden succumbing of the villain *Radford*, and the means by which this is effected, are not so much natural growths of the plot as violent grafts upon it induced by the dilemmas of dramatic composition. Still the play thrives, and deservedly, in right of its dominant figure—the forcible and firmly drawn character of *Hugh Trevor*. The sacrificial act which closes *Hugh's* life and the play does not shock credibility; for the authors, while they have not flinched from making full exhibition of their hero's vices, his vindictiveness, intemperance, and morbid irrationality, have yet allowed it to be seen that the capacity for worthiness of thought and achievement really lurks within him, and that something of poetic fervour leavens even his worst infirmities. Dissolute and ragged, he is yet picturesque and gallant; at once a misanthrope and a debauchee, he is

brave and tender nevertheless ; and the crisis of his life arising, he devotes himself to death with a resolute zeal and an air of exaltation that are really grand. The part is one which any actor possessed of the due physical qualities might be proud to undertake ; it affords grateful histrionic opportunities, and it appeals strongly to the imagination and the sympathy of an audience.

Mr. Clayton's impersonation of the character leaves little to be desired. Indeed the actor is enabled in the part of *Hugh Trevor* to win heartier recognition of his merits than has hitherto been awarded him. An artistic carefulness and consistency have invariably distinguished Mr. Clayton's exertions upon the stage ; but he now displays unexpected skill in depicting vehemence of emotion and abandonment to the passion of the scene. No doubt his performance might be enhanced by a more discreet distribution of light and shade, by a more economic employment of his physical resources. In his desire to be animated and strong he is prone to an excess of emphasis, and in certain of his more declamatory passages he too nearly approaches the bombastic. Still he affects and kindles his auditors in a very marked degree. He has completely possessed himself of the character he represents, and never permits it for a moment to escape his grasp ; he is always manly, alert, and energetic, and he imparts to the play the enthusiasm and excitement indispensable to its welfare. The final scene of the scaffold might, perhaps, be excised with advantage, and occasionally the dialogue in which *Hugh* takes part would gain in effect by condensation ; but, generally, the interest stirred at the rising of the curtain is sustained to its fall. *Lady Marsden* seems to be unavoidably but a weak heroine by the side of so robust a hero as *Hugh Trevor*, and from the point of view of the audience she labours under the

defect of being a lady who has erred in her choice of a lover, in preferring to the devoted *Hugh* his rather indistinct half-brother ; but Miss Coghlan, although her art stands greatly in need of refining influences, plays the part with a spirit and a command of vehement utterance that should be turned to good account upon some future occasion. It is much for a young actress to be able to express passion and to move commiseration, and on this account the absence of the minor conditions of good acting may perhaps be excused. Miss Caroline Hill exerts herself to endow with life the subordinate character of *Mary Rivers* ; but the authors have scarcely provided opening for success in this direction. *Mary Rivers* is something too mysterious ; and her assumption of male attire and acceptance of the post of page to the Hanoverian *Colonel Damer*, with a view to aiding the enterprise of *Hugh Trevor*, are measures that stand removed from ordinary powers of comprehension. It only remains to add that Mr. Horace Wigan gives proper significance to the part of the Government spy and "sequestration inspector," *Radford*, and that the representation has not lacked satisfactory assistance from the arts of the scene-painter and the costumer.



## XCIV.

## "RIP VAN WINKLE."

[Princess's Theatre.—November 1875.]

AFTER a lapse of ten years, Mr. Jefferson, as *Rip Van Winkle*, reappears in London, to find that at any rate no change has affected the relations subsisting between himself and his public. Time has not perceptibly thinned the ranks of his English friends, nor dulled their memory of his merits. The extraordinary success obtained at the Adelphi in 1865 is now renewed and confirmed at the Princess's Theatre. The return of the actor—one of the very few genuine artists ever given or lent by America to England—is indeed greeted with an enthusiasm that must afford him real gratification.

If Mr. Jefferson is to be described as a player of one part only, it must be understood that this is because popular demand will have it so. He has at hand a whole gallery of impersonations; but his admirers are so delighted with one picture, that they persist in closing their eyes to the others. So it is simply as *Rip* that Mr. Jefferson is known on the London boards—the *Rip* of Washington Irving's story and of Mr. Boucicault's melodrama. Earlier adaptations of the tale to the stage are in existence, and indeed there had been *Rips* seen in London, though not perhaps

of English growth, prior to the arrival of Mr. Jefferson. In 1833 and again in 1845 Mr. Hackett, once famed as the most popular comedian of America, was playing *Rip Van Winkle* at Covent Garden and the Haymarket Theatres. It was expressly for Mr. Jefferson, however, that Mr. Boucicault contrived his play, the chief faults of which arise from the excess of art employed in its conduct. The integrity of the original subject has been scarcely tampered with ; but it has been surrounded with much alien matter—it appears embedded in new incidents and conditions. The drama is complete and most effective ; nevertheless the spectator is troubled with suspicions that a theme so fantastic needed not treatment so formal, might have been presented to better advantage if left in the pleasant haziness of its original state. Mr. Boucicault, however, is a conscientious stage-carpenter, who delights in smooth planing, neat dove-tailing, and hitting every nail precisely on the head ; he cannot bear to drop his curtain until he has duly allotted their proper shares of poetical justice to all his characters, and formerly wound up his play with a neat appeal to the audience. In truth, perhaps he has appreciated rather the prose than the poetry which lurks in the fable of *Rip Van Winkle*, all its merriment and extravagance notwithstanding.

The first impression induced by Mr. Jefferson in this part of *Rip* concerns his admirable picturesqueness as an actor. He now seems to be a boor by Teniers, and now a grotesque figure by Callot, while his aspect in the later scenes, after his awakening from his twenty years' sleep, conveys suggestions of Tintoret or Titian. He has an ease of movement and a grace of attitude that owe nothing apparently to premeditation, but are yet invariably appropriate and of invaluable assistance to the illusion of the scene. He has

that seeming unconsciousness of his audience which is the peculiar possession of actors of the first class, while he is, of course, thoroughly skilled in all the artifices of the stage, displaying his accomplishments, however, with rare moderation and discernment. His management of his voice is masterly; his tones are seldom raised above a conversational level; his distinctness of speech has about it no show of effort; yet every word he utters comes home to and tells upon his audience: the humour of his Dutch accent never being forced upon the ear as a thing necessarily demanding laughter, but employed with ease and calm, as though it were in truth inseparable from the actor's own natural method of utterance. It is simply by his surprising naturalness, indeed, that Mr. Jefferson commands applause in the earlier portions of the play. *Rip* is a tippler and unlettered; he loves the glass out of an inherent conviviality of disposition; but he is acute-witted enough, and his sense of humour is exceedingly strong. He perceives something comical even in his own degradation and ruin; his weakness in resuming the evil habit he had "sworn off" is to him more laughable than shameful; he is amused by his own apprehensions of his wife's scolding tongue; and though he reviles his vehement helpmate, it is without real bitterness, with a droll sense, indeed, that he fully merits her worst treatment of him. He is lazy, inebriate, worthless; he has squandered his property and totes at a tavern while his wife and children are left at home but scantily provided with food and raiment; yet he never loses hold upon sympathy. A certain tenderness of nature redeems him from absolute reprobation. It is pointed out that he is on excellent terms with *Schneider* and the other dogs of the village; it is shown that he is the intimate friend of the children, who trust him with all their thoughts and hopes,

and share with him their simple happiness. Prettier scenes of the kind can hardly have been presented upon the stage than those dealing with *Rip* and his daughter *Meenie* and her tiny boy-lover *Hendrick*, with the prattle of the little ones and the humorous notes and glances of the elder as he toasts them and their happiness: the actor here, be it said, receiving capital aid from his small playfellows—a very clever and well-trained little boy and girl. There is serious interest as well as comic further on, when *Rip* learns, from *Hendrick's* reading of the deed prepared by *Derrick*, that villany is afoot, and that there is a plot to rob him of the little that is still left him. Mr. Jefferson's remarkable command of facial expression becomes now of important service; his looks undergo curious variations, with every now and then a relapse into the old odd merriment and the laugh that is half of intelligence, half of intoxication. In the scene closing the first act there is perhaps tediousness of some five minutes' duration, owing to excess of insistence upon characteristics of *Rip* that have been already abundantly manifested; but there is genuine pathos in his final departure from his home at the fierce bidding of his wife. In the second act *Rip* enters the spirit-world and encounters the spectral bowl-players and the ghost of *Hendrick Hudson*—supernatural figures that might perhaps wear less palpable and substantial forms than are permitted them on the stage of the Princess's, although it should be said there has been considerable improvement in the scenic disposition of this portion of the drama since its last representation in London. Efforts are now demanded of the representative of *Rip* that may not be tested by reference to ordinary experience; he is shown under ideal conditions, amid most fantastic surroundings. *Rip* is gravely perplexed; his jocosity tempered with awe; his good spirits

dashed by a sense that he is in the presence of unearthly creatures, and liable to their supernatural solicitings. He drinks to them, however, in his customary way from the cup they proffer him : then he sinks to the earth and sleeps for twenty years. His awakening is next exhibited. He is quite an old man now, although changed unconsciously, with the beard of *King Lear*, and strange shrill anile notes in his voice ; the actor assuming with wonderful dexterity an air of sudden age that has something more than natural about it ; he is racked with rheumatic agonies ; he moves with quaint stiffness ; his very form seems to have withered. He is as one half-dreaming, struggling to reconcile incongruities ; to join the past to the present, and to comprehend his prolonged slumber. There is much humour in all this, but it is of a subdued kind, and tenderly blended with pathos. In his alternate expression of hope and fear, when the peculiarities of his case have become intelligible to him, or nearly so, in his feverish desire to see and embrace his daughter, and then in his piteous appeal to her to recognise him, the actor displays histrionic art of the rarest kind, and affects his audience very profoundly. The whole performance is indeed one of veritable triumph ; it is difficult to believe that more consummate acting can ever have been seen in a theatre. If memory may be trusted, Mr. Jefferson's impersonation, while losing nothing of its force, has gained in refinement during his ten years absence. Certain of his scenes have without doubt undergone revision, and are invested with a greater delicacy than originally characterised them.

The perfectness of Mr. Jefferson's art necessarily dwarfs his fellow-players and magnifies their deficiencies. A word must suffice in recognition of the spirit and intelligence of Mrs. Mellon's *Gretchen*.

XCV.

"MASKS AND FACES."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—October 1875.]

THE comedy of "Masks and Faces" by Messrs. Tom Taylor and Charles Reade first came upon the stage in 1852, when Mr. Webster was lessee and manager of the Haymarket Theatre, Mrs. Stirling his chief actress, and the late Mr. Leigh Murray a very admirable representative of the lovers and youthful heroes alike of the serious and comic drama. The success of the play endured for some seasons, and "Masks and Faces" took rank among the "stock pieces" of the stage. But as, one by one, the players originally concerned in the performance quitted the scene, the play was less frequently presented; there seemed a prospect indeed of its fading from the list of "stock pieces" and falling into the category of "superannuated dramas"—works much respected but never played. From this fate, however, "Masks and Faces" has been for a while rescued by the management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, a management that has of late exhibited a curious desire to astonish its patrons, and to be enterprising at all hazards. The authors, naturally sympathising with this revival of their early composition, have sought to benefit it by revision of the text and by additions to the dialogue;

it may be found, however, that they but lengthened a play that was already abundantly long.

"Masks and Faces" is very carefully and conscientiously played, but it must be confessed that the comedy does not please as once it did. Applause it certainly obtains, but it scarcely stirs enthusiasm; it is found indeed to be tedious at times, and even to approach the dull. Yet the play is throughout well written, and the leading characters are limned with unusual force and distinctness. There is no lack of wit and pleasantry, and certain of the scenes abound in natural pathos. The dramatic interest, however, is far from strong, and the story is not constructed with much adroitness; the minor characters weary the audience without lending any appreciable support to the intrigue, and generally there is great disproportion between the words spoken and the deeds done. Assuredly the larger share of the original success of "Masks and Faces" must have been due to the players who first sustained the parts of *Triplet* and *Peg Woffington*, and who discovered in those characters more grateful occupation than they had ever obtained before or were ever afterwards destined to obtain. The authors have forborne to date their story; but its incidents might perhaps be assigned to the year 1750, a season or two before the retirement of Quin from the stage. Accuracy, however, has not been attempted; there has been no desire to set forth very precisely the facts of *Mrs. Woffington's* life, or to portray with any exactness the manners of the eighteenth century. Almost any other actress—Mrs. Oldfield, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Cibber, or Mrs. Clive—would have served the purposes of the story just as well as *Mrs. Woffington*. But the actress who figures in the play proves to be a thoroughly effective part in representation; she is a frail creature enough, forced to plead guilty to many sins

and shames, leading a life of error and of degradation ; yet she is for the moment exalted and refined by her genuine love for a suitor she believes to be honest ; she is kind-hearted, generous, sympathetic, and genial ; she delights to soothe the sick and to cheer and help the unfortunate ; she wins her way to the hearts of the audience very shortly after her entrance upon the scene. *Triplet* affords an admirable contrast to this hearty, boisterous *Mrs. Woffington* ; a broken-down author, actor, and artist, hungry himself, and with a starving wife and family at home in his Grub Street garret, he is the wretched hack pictured by Hogarth, and described cruelly by Pope, tenderly by Goldsmith. Misery has crushed but scarcely soured him ; in his most desperate circumstances he rarely abandons the hope of fame and of future success. He is very gentle with his ailing wife, and forbearing with his unkempt, unfed children, who *will* play noisy games while, with an aching heart, he tries to write a comedy. *Mr. Ernest Vane*, a young country squire, pays court to *Mrs. Woffington*, concealing the fact that he is a married man ; thus he leaves his fair young wife, *Mabel*, exposed to the dishonourable addresses of *Sir Charles Pomander*, a town beau of evil reputation. A slight story arises from the combination of these personages, but the play deals rather with character than with plot. *Colley Cibber* and *Quin* are brought upon the scene, without saying or doing anything, however, to justify the distinction accorded them by theatrical history ; the two critics, *Soaper* and *Snarl*, appear at intervals, and prove themselves very dreary company indeed.

The performance suffers generally from the actors' excess of deliberation and punctiliousness, which has indeed almost the effect of want of spirit. Prolonged pauses are fatal to light dialogue ; repartees fall flat when over-much time is



occupied in their delivery ; and the slightness of the theme becomes too evident when it is thus subjected to pressure and tension. As *Mrs. Woffington*, Mrs. Bancroft plays like a genuine artist, with keen appreciation of the humorous, and with subtle suggestions of pathos. Perhaps the lady's most successful scenes are those relating to *Peg's* rather unaccountable affection for *Ernest Vane* ; for it is throughout strange to the spectators that so weak a gentleman should stir such strong emotions in the bosoms of both *Mabel Vane* and *Peg Woffington*. It does not lie within Mrs. Bancroft's means to depict the *Mrs. Woffington* of fact—a vehement and versatile performer, skilled alike in tragedy and comedy, and obtaining equal applause as *Lady Macbeth*, as *Sir Harry Wildair*, or as *Lady Betty Modish* ; physical qualities are wanting, and it becomes necessary to substitute a dainty sportiveness for reckless high spirits. In truth, it is rather a refined Nell Gwynne than an audacious Woffington that is presented at the Prince of Wales's Theatre ; but the impersonation is remarkable nevertheless for its winsomeness and ingenuity. The character of *Mabel Vane* has never been so happily sustained as by Miss Ellen Terry, whose natural impulsiveness and intensely sympathetic voice and manner move the audience deeply, and secure very hearty and well-deserved applause. As *Triplet*, Mr. Bancroft presents a quaint figure, and succeeds in moving a measure of commiseration ; but the poor poet does not seem very real or credible ; his humour has departed, and he is deficient in the buoyant hopefulness which should be his sustaining characteristic amid all his humility and misfortune. The actor's shortcomings, however, are not ascribable to any lack of painstaking or intelligence. Mr. Archer invests *Ernest Vane* with far too severe and reflective an aspect and demeanour ; Mr. Coghlan is a thoroughly competent *Sir Charles Pomander*.

XCVI.

"TOTTLE'S."

[Gaiety Theatre.—December 1875.]

MR. TOOLE enjoys a very special position upon the stage. He is the last of the low comedians of the Wright and Liston pattern. It may cost him rather more effort to entertain; but altogether his success is by no means inferior to theirs, while his method of art is assuredly of a cleaner and more wholesome kind. He is possessed of all the traditions of stage humour, the tricks of glance, gesture, and intonation, the expedients of caricature, which have, time out of mind, won laughter from playgoers; still it is further to be said of him that he owns much original drollery, with natural buoyancy of spirits, and a certain surprising energy of grotesqueness altogether peculiar to himself. Long since he established with his audiences that hearty understanding which is so particularly valuable to the comic actor, which binds them to him as by an electrical chain; he has their mirth thoroughly at command; a sort of jocose atmosphere seems to surround him; the very sound of his voice stirs memories and suggestions of merriment; while his presence on the scene excites the most boisterous applause. Of a performer thus prosperously circumstanced, new essays in art are hardly to be expected.

His sway over his public may appear to be supreme; but he is in truth their bondman: they demand at his hands, not novelty, but repetition, or at best old things thinly disguised, and calling themselves new. Hazlitt was apt to complain of Jones the light comedian that he was "always the same Mr. Jones who shows his teeth and rolls his eyes;" and possibly a kindred charge might be brought against Mr. Toole. But it must be borne in mind that he is precisely what his audience would have him be, and what they have helped to make him. When it is announced, therefore, that Mr. Toole is to undertake a new part in a new play, a fervent hope prevails among his patrons that he is not going to be very different from what he has always been, and that the entertainment may prove to be, after all, of the familiar sort. In the case of a popular low comedian, playgoers are much opposed to innovation, are very thorough-going Conservatives.

Mr. Byron has appreciated this view of the case. He has on former occasions provided characters for Mr. Toole, and has always been careful that these shall wear a certain family resemblance—shall be distinguished by the same "trick of face." Contriving the drama of "Tottle's" for Mr. Toole and the Gaiety Theatre, the playwright has taken for granted that freshness of subject or any particular regard for nature or probability was not required of him. A tradesman retired from business, unlettered but rich, aspiring to a life of gentility, but much encumbered by the manners of the shop, a Cockney accent, the mistakes in speech of Mrs. Malaprop, and a habit of humorous reference to his old occupation, is a stereotyped vehicle of comicality in plays of this class, *Mr. Tottle*, the hero of the story, is described as "late of Tottle's refreshment-rooms; Tottle's eating-house, Bucklersbury; and Tottle's

à la mode-beef shop, Borough Road ;" and is, in truth, but a reproduction of *Mr. Middlewick*, the famous buttermilk of "Our Boys." *Tottle*, the man of fortune, bears himself as a tavern-waiter, and his talk is of the cheap eating-house. He is a widower with one son, *Horace*, upon whose education he has expended large sums. Visiting a fashionable watering-place, *Tottle* has been greatly exercised by the fascinations of *Miss Julia Lilford*, an adventuress of surpassing beauty ; at the same time he is provided with an opportunity of marrying his cousin, *Kate Trenchard*, a lady of decidedly mature years ; for she had been *Tottle's* first love quite in his schoolboy days, when, indeed, they were both children together. The elderly and rather dowdy *Kate* can by no means afford comparison with the beauteous *Julia*, whose costumes are most luxuriously fashionable, and the choice of *Tottle* is soon made. Of course much unhappiness results from his marriage with *Miss Lilford*. For to do Mr. Byron justice, he has tried hard to import seriousness of interest into his comic drama. We are even allowed to witness very unseemly and even painful scenes between the newly-married. *Tottle* grows more and more coarse and morose and violent, although not without sufficient provocation. For *Mrs. Tottle* is cold and heartless, insolent, and, in the end, faithless. After fierce upbraiding and defiance of her husband, she openly elopes with an old lover, *Captain Raffler*, a blackleg and bully of the worst description. It becomes necessary indeed to resort to the Divorce Court to readjust the position of *Tottle*, and to enable him at last to find a third wife in his boy-love, the matronly-looking *Miss Trenchard*. It must be said that these grave events are of a depressing and repellent quality ; the first two acts of "Tottle's," indeed, are certainly dull, and but for the relief afforded by the closing

scenes, disappointment and disaster might have attended the representation. It was probably with a feeling of increased comfort that Mr. Byron himself turned from the discordant portions of his work to the complete harmony of its comical conclusion. For the third act is replete with facetious antics, practical jokes, and pantomimic excesses. All regard for the restrictions of comedy is now wholly abandoned; the characters are exhibited revelling in the wildest of farces. A wedding-breakfast is presented upon the stage. *Horace Tottle* has become the husband of *Mary*, the niece of a worthy old gentleman named *Cobham Brown*. But *Tottle* the elder, arriving suddenly from abroad, is led to believe, upon very insufficient grounds, that a marriage has been solemnised between his early love, *Miss Trenchard*, and this same *Mr. Brown*. The jealousy and indignation of *Tottle* betray him into a frenzy. He disguises himself as a waiter, and comports himself in the most eccentric manner. He joins in the conversation; he interrupts the speeches; he breaks the china; he upsets the choicer dishes; he grossly insults the company; but, given Mr. Toole in such a situation, the consequences are easily to be imagined. The fun is of a very obvious and artless kind; but of course the audience can only give way to the most unhesitating mirth. And Mr. Toole, in his extra-large Berlin gloves, his misfitting clothes, strange wig, and false whiskers—a waiter moved by strong emotions to extravagant attitudes, passionate speeches, and a complete overturning of all the conventionalisms and proprieties of the art of waiting at table—will probably be long called upon to appear before the playgoing public. Indeed, a more thoroughly ludicrous figure has not for some time been seen upon the stage.

“Tottle’s” is written in Mr. Byron’s usual way. The

play is plentifully supplied with pleasantry, the author welcoming all jests alike to his net, appropriating and creating by turns, fully persuaded the while that he is but catering for a public prone to be pleased with rattles and tickled with straws. Such a play could scarcely exist but for Mr. Toole; on the other hand, it is for Mr. Toole's sake that works of the "Tottle's" class are called into being. The actor, according to his wont, spares no exertion to please, and fairly earns the loud applause bestowed upon him. His *Mr. Tottle* will probably be classed among his most extravagantly comic impersonations. In other respects the play is well represented. Miss Farren is especially to be commended for the good taste and discretion she displays in the part of *Horace Tottle*. The difficult scene in which *Horace* reproaches his stepmother for her treachery is very skilfully dealt with; an unexpected note of pathos here and there deserving marked recognition. Miss Farren has not hitherto presented so artistic an example of stage portraiture. Mr. Clifford Cooper, who is new to the Gaiety, is a satisfactory *Cobham Brown*; and the little part of *Mary Brown* is pleasantly filled by Mdle. Camille—once famous in Paris as the original representative of Fanfan Bénéïton, but now, strange to say, with scarcely a trace of foreign accent, taking rank upon the English stage as a picturesque and interesting *ingénue*.

## XCVII.

## "ANNE BOLEYN."

[Haymarket Theatre.—February 1876.]

THOSE playgoers who admired or enjoyed Mr. Tom Taylor's historical plays of "Twixt Axe and Crown" and "Joan of Arc" will probably be well content with his new tragedy of "Anne Boleyn." Mr. Taylor, it need hardly be said, is a lettered and cultivated writer, who for some thirty years has been an active purveyor of theatrical entertainments of various kinds, from pantomimes up to, or down to, poetic dramas. His plays are not likely, therefore, to be dull from lack of literary capacity, or faulty owing to limited experience or want of practice on the part of their author; but at the same time they must not be searched for evidence of an urgent and exalted imagination impelling their creation; they are too obviously contrived to meet the requirements of *this* theatre or the desires of *that* performer; and, if we may say so without offence, they are much rather the work of a man of business than of a man of genius. "Anne Boleyn" follows the scheme of "Joan of Arc" and "Twixt Axe and Crown," and purports to relate history in blank verse. Little recourse has been had to invention; no fictitious personages are permitted to occupy the scene; history is not employed after the manner of Scott in his

novels, and Dumas and Victor Hugo in their dramas, as an impressive background to a story of romance; "Anne Boleyn" is indeed a dramatic version of the text-books. Mr. Taylor is nothing if not strictly historical; he can give chapter and verse for his every incident; and his characters, costumed with every regard for accuracy, converse at great length certainly, but always in carefully prepared speeches imitative of the phraseology of the past. One of Mr. Disraeli's characters, on a special occasion, speaks of the necessity of "rubbing up his Goldsmith." There has been much "rubbing up of Goldsmith" in preparing "Anne Boleyn" for representation, with frequent reference to later chroniclers, including, it seems, Mr. Hepworth Dixon, whose historical writings, by the way, possess a certain flavour of Fitzball well commending them to melodramatic use. Mr. Taylor crowds his stage with celebrated characters, and supplies local and historical colour so profusely that all sense of outline and proportion is oftentimes lost to the canvas; in his anxiety to be faithful to fact he presses into his service numberless bits and scraps relating to the period dealt with, until his play becomes something of a mosaic of small historic matters. No doubt, what the work is, that the author designed it to be; and he may deem such an explanation a sufficient answer to all objection upon the subject. But, in truth, dramatic art has little more concern in compositions of the "Anne Boleyn" class than in the arrangement of the figures in Madame Tussaud's Exhibition; the waxen effigies having, we may note, the advantage of closer resemblance to their originals and scarcely less vitality than are enjoyed by Mr. Taylor's characters. If Shakspearian example be pleaded, the conclusive replication is too manifest to need setting forth. But even in form these productions of Mr. Taylor are not very like the histories of Shakspeare; they



correspond far more closely to the dramas concocted from time to time by Signor Giacometti for Madame Ristori, and expounding the story now of Queen Elizabeth and now of Marie Antoinette. They are carefully and closely packed with historic persons and events; they are heedful of fact and tradition; they rarely deviate into novelty or originality; they are desperately prolix, of most distressing length; and they are expressly planned to suit the peculiarities, or it may be to gratify the vanity, of an individual performer, for whose sake all parts but one are more or less deprived of effect and reduced to insignificance. Although not a salient or a very undeserving example of works of the class, "*Anne Boleyn*" is assuredly what actors commonly style a "one-part" play. In representation it proves to be uninteresting, or, more candidly, it may be said to be dispiriting and fatiguing in no ordinary degree.

With professions of reverence for historical study, and with an eye also, as we may assume, to the exigencies of his leading actress, Mr. Taylor portrays *Anne Boleyn* as a paragon of virtue, whose excellence is heightened by contrast with her rival, *Jane Seymour*, represented as mock-modest, cunning, and designing—in fact, as a mere minx. Each act of the play has its separate title, as *Wood*, *Won*, *Wed*, *Wronged*, and—alliteration failing at last—*Doomed*. *Anne* is depicted as an affectionate daughter, a faithful and loving wife, a fond mother. She is fully endowed, indeed, with the many good qualities that usually find enumeration upon tombstones. Her marriage with the king is shown to be a union of the purest affection, *Catherine of Arragon* being denied representation upon the scene, lest the spectators' sympathy with the loves of *Henry* and *Anne* should suffer abatement. The earlier acts show forth, tediously enough, the life of *Anne* as a maid of honour. She gives up her lover, *Percy*, after affectionately

embracing him, and flies to Mechlin to avoid a project of marriage with *James Butler*. She dances a ronde to music of the period with other ladies and gentlemen in waiting upon royalty, and listens while *Sir Thomas Wyatt* sings a song of his own writing to music composed by Mrs. Tom Taylor. After a lapse of seven years *Anne* is seen to be an invalid in white brocaded silk at Hever Castle. She is consumed, apparently, by a passion for the king, and has provoked much hopeless love in the bosoms of *Wyatt* and *Mark Smeaton*, a musician of the king's chamber. *Percy* appears no more. As queen, *Anne* distinguishes herself by her abuse of the Pope, and by the kind patronage and applause she bestows upon the New Testament. Discovering certain love-passages between the *King* and *Jane Seymour*, *Anne* treats that young lady with exceeding violence: tearing from her a miniature of the *King*, threatening to shoot her with bow and arrow, and indeed going near to strangling her. The last act is passed in the Tower, and is remarkable for its prolonged dolefulness. *Anne* has been condemned to death. *Cranmer* preaches, sympathises, and consoles. The sorrows of the *Earl of Wiltshire*, the queen's father, are abundantly exhibited. *Henry Norris*, *Francis Weston*, *William Brereton*, and *George Boleyn* deliver last dying speeches on their road to the scaffold. The fall of the curtain is delayed to the latest moment possible; and indeed great need exists for *Anne's* borrowing from Charles II., and apologising with him for being such an unconscionable time dying. The play occupies four hours in representation; nevertheless the management has the heartlessness to print in the programmes a request that 'the audience will kindly remain seated until the curtain falls!'

Miss Neilson, who plays *Anne Boleyn*, is by no means a

great or a very accomplished actress, and her art has not gained in refinement or discipline by her absence from the London stage. She is skilled, however, in a certain routine of theatrical artifice, and can duly accomplish the smiles and frowns, the stares and starts, the tricks of gesture and attitude, which are the main constituents of popular acting. Over pathos she has but limited command, and she cannot enable the spectator ever to forget that she is acting, and acting after a very conventional fashion. But she is stirring and forcible at times, is unsparing of physical exertion, and clearly takes the greatest pains possible with the characters assigned to her for representation. It must be no light or enviable task to commit to memory the long scenes Mr. Taylor has written for *Anne Boleyn*; yet Miss Neilson is complete mistress of her text, and out of her abundant knowledge is even able to assist certain of her playfellows when distressed by lapse of memory. The most artistic acting in "*Anne Boleyn*" is contributed by Mr. Arthur Cecil, who contrives to impart distinction and humour to the subordinate character of *Eustace Chapuis*, envoy from the Emperor Charles V., a conspirator against the *Queen* and mainly instrumental in producing her downfall. And praise is also due to Mr. Harold Kyrle, a new actor, who plays *Percy*, and by dint of good looks, alert bearing, a resonant sympathetic voice, and a distinct delivery, impresses the audience very favourably. Mr. Kyrle should be able presently to take a foremost place among the representatives of the young gentlemen of the drama. Mr. Howe personates the *Duke of Norfolk* after a sound and sensible fashion, and Miss Carlisle is a competent *Jane Seymour*. The *Cranmer* was a little too comical in the unctuous piety of his oratory; and the *King* might have stepped out of a pantomime, he was so exuberant of action and grotesque of air.

XCVIII.

"OTHELLO."

[Lyceum Theatre.—February 1876.]

MR. IRVING'S *Othello* has been enthusiastically applauded and as sharply condemned. There has never, we may note, been perfect unanimity in regard to the achievements of the actor; but on the present occasion the party of dissent has gained strength, and ventured upon more distinct assertion of its opinions. Something of this may probably be due to the fact that *Othello* is Mr. Irving's third Shakespearian assumption. His histrionic system has become a more familiar matter than it was two seasons ago, and thus defects of style that escaped remark, if they did not win favour in his *Hamlet*, now incur grave rebuke. The personal peculiarities and shortcomings of an actor of any force are speedily forgiven him. The playgoers of the past soon learned to forget the low stature of Garrick and the "foggy throat" of John Kemble. It is understood now that every delineation presented by Mr. Irving must suffer in some degree from the irremediable physical characteristics of the actor. But it has, perhaps, been insufficiently taken into account that there exist strong preconceptions concerning the character of *Othello* which almost attach exceptional conditions to its representation

upon the stage, and that what are known as Mr. Irving's "mannerisms," in this regard, acquire a curious prominence, and place him at an unforeseen disadvantage. In effect, *Othello* has long enjoyed popular admiration for the very qualities that Mr. Irving is least enabled to impart to his stage portraitures. This should, perhaps, have withheld the actor from the part; but it should not induce unmindfulness of much that is worthy and distinguished in his performance; for the "mannerisms" notwithstanding—and the many blemishes of a far more serious kind—there remain passages of Mr. Irving's *Othello* marked by rare artistic beauty, and meriting cordial recognition.

It is not only nature and continued habit of manner that separate his *Othello* from previous *Othellos*. The costume is different, for one thing. *Othello* has usually worn robes of an Oriental texture and device; but Mr. Irving will none of these. His *Othello* follows the counsel given years ago by Mr. Disraeli in "Vivian Grey," and appears "in the full dress of a Venetian magnifico of the Middle Ages; a fit companion for Cornaro, or Grimani, or Barberigo, or Foscari." No loss of picturesqueness is thus incurred, however. The absence of *Othello's* wonted dignity and repose of bearing is far more seriously felt. In the first two acts Mr. Irving is feverish and sensitive, but does not aim apparently at making any great impression. "Keep up your bright swords" is spoken petulantly; the address to the Senate is delivered with considerable art, although an air of almost tearful sentiment attends the description of the wooing of *Desdemona*. *Othello* is without chivalric bearing; he becomes curiously effeminate in the presence of his bride; there is evidence of moral weakness in his obsequious uxoriousness. "Silence that dreadful bell" is properly spoken as a command, and without undue display

of wrath. The dismissal of *Cassio* is well delivered. But it is not until the third act that there is either pronounced failure or consummate success in the performance. Mr. Irving's play of face and skilful application of tone when jealousy first stirs in the mind of *Othello* are very admirable; for although Coleridge and others have maintained that the passion of *Othello* is not jealousy, but that his suffering arises from "the dire necessity of loving without limit one whom his heart pronounces to be unworthy of that love," it is clear that at the outset the *Moor* is troubled by the most ignoble and degrading suspicions. Mr. Irving discriminates finely between *Othello's* consideration of feminine frailty as an abstract if painful proposition, and his gradual perception that *Iago's* hints apply to *Desdemona*, and that the wreck of his happiness is imminent. But the mine of passion is sprung too soon and too suddenly, and there is absolute waste of force in the wild utterance of the lines beginning, "I had rather be a toad." After this the merits and demerits of the representation become scarcely divisible. We may note, however, the delicate plaintiveness of "No, not much moved;" the acute and distressing air of shame which marks the delivery of the direction, "Set on your wife to observe;" the sense of mystery conveyed by the description of the handkerchief; and the declamatory force of the passage, "Like to the Pontic sea," &c. The "Farewell" necessarily lacked music of voice; and other speeches suffered severely from the impetuosity of the speaker. One of Hazlitt's descriptions of Kean is indeed peculiarly applicable to Mr. Irving: "He is too often in the highest key of passion, *too uniformly on the verge of extravagance*, too constantly on the rack." He wearies the eye with his incessant changes of posture, his excessive and graceless movements of head and hands;

while he offends the ear by too frequently permitting the fervour of his speech to degenerate into unintelligible and inarticulate rant. Yet it is fair to state that there are redeeming touches even in his worst and coarsest painting; that there are grand moments even in the very uncouthness and grotesqueness of his frenzy, and that the sense of an aberrant and diseased brain accompanied by exceeding physical prostration after the epileptic seizure of the fourth act, is conveyed with great artistic force and singular regard for natural truth. The fifth act is weirdly pathetic and impressive, without recourse to melodramatic terrors or literal interpretation of the stage directions. Mr. Irving's acting here abounds in emotion and passion, with grateful intervals of desperate calm, as when *Othello* stands petrified and aghast at his own most miserable folly and crime, resembling, it must be confessed, as he folds round him his robe, one of the late Mr. Fenimore Cooper's Mohawk braves draped in his blanket. The death scene avoids the conceits of Signor Salvini and Mr. Fechter, and is well contrived: *Othello* stabs himself, falls, drags himself beside the bed of *Desdemona*, and there sinks dead.

As a first essay, the performance is certainly remarkable, but, as we have shown, its imperfections and infirmities are many and grave. Certain of these, no doubt, Mr. Irving has power to amend, and his *Othello* will probably mellow and sober under the wholesome influences of time and experience. But there will always remain defects and blemishes inseparable from the actor which in this character the public may find it very difficult altogether to forgive and forget. The tragedy has been liberally and tastefully provided for by the management; the scenery, costumes, and stage-fittings leave very little to be desired. Nor has there been lack of ability generally on the part of

the Lyceum company. Miss Isabel Bateman is, to be sure, but a feeble *Desdemona*, with a demeanour that is throughout monotonously and laboriously despondent ; and Mr. Carton fails to invest *Roderigo* with much humour or individuality. But the *Cassio* of Mr. Brooke is well deserving of commendation for its intelligence and spirit ; Miss Bateman is an able and vigorous *Emilia*, although her vehemence in the fourth act exceeds the requirements of the situation ; and Mr. Forrester plays *Iago* with special skill and with the ease of a soundly practised actor. The suggestion of the full measure of intellectual force which *Iago* must surely have possessed may perhaps be lacking ; but there are many actors of far greater pretence who have fallen very short of the distinction achieved by Mr. Forrester in this character.



## XCIX.

## "QUEEN MARY."

[Lyceum Theatre.—April 1876.]

UPON the stage the Laureate's "Queen Mary" is probably assured of the sort of success that comes of curiosity and of the respect legitimately due to a great writer; and so far the objects of the Lyceum management in presenting the work may be substantially served; but that an enduring addition has been made to the dramatic repertory of the country is not to be believed. Nor should it be charged against the spectators that they remained almost unmoved by the representation of Mr. Tennyson's tragedy, or betrayed lack of power to appreciate the merits of the production submitted to their judgment. As a theatrical exhibition "Queen Mary" fails, owing to its deficiency in dramatic quality. It can hardly have been devised originally with the most remote view to representation upon the stage. Its form is so far dramatic that it resembles in many respects the "histories" of the Elizabethan stage; but it is to be noted that these precedents are almost obsolete, and that even the "histories" of Shakspeare are scarcely now to be reckoned among acting plays. More is needed than dialogue to constitute a drama; the audience have to be entertained and excited by action not less than by speech.

The stage is to be occupied not merely by orators, but by accompanying events and movements, which are in truth the living part of the drama. As Jeffrey observed upon Byron's "Sardanapalus," "If an author does not write in the ideal presence of an eager and diversified assemblage, he may be a poet perhaps, but assuredly he will never be a dramatist. If Lord Byron has no hankering after stage-effect—if he is not haunted with the visible presentment of the persons he has created—if in setting down a vehement invective he does not fancy the tone in which Mr. Kean would deliver it, and anticipate the long applauses of the pit, then he may be sure that neither his feelings nor his genius are in unison with the stage at all." Can any one credit that in writing "Queen Mary" Mr. Tennyson dreamed for a moment of rousing the pit, or considered in the slightest degree the delivery of Miss Bateman or the tones and attitudes of Mr. Irving?

But sufficient proof that "Queen Mary" was not in the first instance designed for the theatre is to be found in the violence done to the work in suiting it, after a fashion, to the purposes of representation. The changes made would be called rude and ruthless indeed had they been perpetrated by other than the hands of the author himself. Abbreviation, at all costs, seems to have been the main consideration. And certainly the acting version of "Queen Mary" does not fatigue by reason of its length: its oppressive influences must be ascribed to other causes. There has been extraordinary destruction of the scenes; the *dramatis personæ* have undergone something like a massacre. "Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggats with them? Mine ache to think on't," says *Hamlet*. Mr. Tennyson has made havoc of inventions and creations that must have caused him infinite thought

and painstaking. Of twenty-three scenes there remain only nine; some twenty characters only survive of the original forty-five. *Cardinal Pole* and *Archbishop Cranmer*, *Peter Martyr* and *Father Cole*, *Bishop Bonner* and *Father Bourne*, *Lord Williams of Thame*, *Sir Ralph Bagenhall*, *Sir Thomas Stafford*, *the Duke of Alva*, and *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, all are banished from the stage. With *Lord Howard* are incorporated the characters of *Sir Nicholas Heath* and *Sir Robert Southwell*. Among the suppressed scenes and incidents are the procession of *Mary* and *Elizabeth* through Aldgate; the flight of *Peter Martyr* after his interview with *Cranmer*; the preaching of *Father Bourne* at Paul's Cross; the insurrection of *Wyatt*; the passing of the *King* and *Queen* through Gracechurch Street; the meeting of Parliament in Whitehall; all the passages relating to the fate of *Cranmer*, with the exception of the conversation between the old country wives *Joan* and *Tib*; and *Lady Magdalen's* narrative of the insults offered her by *Philip*. The two scenes relating to the illness and death of the *Queen* are played without interruption, and in consequence rather tax, by their sameness and prolixity, the powers of endurance of the audience. Of new lines there are but few. The royal sisters meet, however, at the close of the play, and after their interchange of forgiveness and expressions of conciliation *Mary* expires in the arms of *Elizabeth*, and *Philip* is permitted an interpolation touching the conduct of the English admiral who had fired upon the Spanish ships, and compelled them to lower their topsails as a mark of deference to the English navy in the narrow seas. Room is thus found for an expression of clap-trap sentiment of the "Rule Britannia" order, to which Mr. Tennyson should hardly have condescended.

It will be seen that much of the stir and action distin-

guishing the original has been eliminated from the stage edition of the work. "Queen Mary" has been wrecked indeed, and its least dramatic constituents are among the salvage. The scenes of the Gatehouse of Westminster and of Guildhall under the mayoralty of *Sir Thomas White* are preserved; otherwise there is scarcely any reference to the rising of *Wyatt*. The *Queen* receives the messengers arriving in quick succession with tidings of the conflict, and something of the manner of Shakspeare's battle scenes is here attempted. But the excision of *Wyatt* and his followers deprives these passages of their proper effect; the *Queen* seems fighting the air, and her repetitive directions, "To the Tower with him!" "To the Tower with *him*!" "To the Tower with *her*!" prompt recollections of that earlier laureate who adapted Shakspeare's "Richard the Third" to theatrical representation. At the Lyceum the spectators see too much of *Queen Mary* and too little of the other characters. One is reminded of the announcement of Catalani's husband: "Ma femme et quatre ou cinq poupées, voilà tout ce qu'il faut." And yet it has not been found practicable to express every characteristic of the *Queen* to be found in the poem. In truth, the most important of these—her passionate yearning for offspring—can only be distantly alluded to upon the stage; and the grand speech in the third act, "He hath awaked! he hath awaked! He stirs within the darkness!" is wholly sacrificed. The drama consists therefore simply of *Mary's* overweening love for her husband and his disdain of the gift she has bestowed upon him. But *Philip* is only a subordinate character; he appears in but two scenes, that are curiously alike: in each he is required to rebuff the *Queen's* fondness and to express his resolve to quit England. Almost the entire weight of the drama therefore devolves upon a

heroine who cannot command the sympathies of a theatrical audience, or move them to interest in her proceedings. Practically *Mary* wearies the spectators not less than she wearies her husband, while his indifference to her seems throughout far more reasonable and intelligible than her devotion to him. It is possible that in the hands of such an actress as Ristori the character of *Mary* might lose much of its ungratefulness, might even be made impressive and affecting in no slight degree. But the art of Miss Bateman has strict limitations. Her voice is hollow, her delivery is monotonous, her manner is conventional; her histrionic method altogether is wanting in variety and in light and shade. She is forcible enough, but she is capable rather of the noise that startles than of the passion that electrifies. The exertions of which she is unsparing carry no sense of conviction to her auditors; they remain almost untouched by a performance that is, in truth, void of inspiration, is lit by no spark of true genius. Let it be said, however, that the actress displays unceasing energy, that she is manifestly most anxious to accomplish the arduous task she has undertaken, and that a note or two of genuine pathos in the last scene greatly relieve its monotony and oppressiveness. Miss Bateman is probably herself much and deeply moved by the character she impersonates; but she is unable to affect her audience in an equal measure. According to Horatian counsel, the actor who would draw tears must first shed them; nevertheless, the player may weep bitterly and yet leave the spectators with dry eyes. As *Philip*, Mr. Irving secures an easy victory; nothing indeed could be better than his performance of this character. He has carefully copied the traditional appearance of the King, and conveys very adroitly his airs of frigid arrogance, heartless cruelty, and intense selfishness; the

fanaticism and gross superstition which were also characteristic of *Philip* the author has not required the actor to demonstrate. Mr. Irving's happiest effort was perhaps contained in his scene with *De Feria*, where *Philip* hints at the prospect of the *Queen's* death, at the possibilities of his union with *Elizabeth*, and, while toying with his poniard, suggests the punishment of his agent if he be not secret in the matter. Noting Mr. Irving's self-control and repose in his personation of *Philip*, one could not but deplore the lack of these qualities in certain of his more ambitious essays. Of the manner in which the other characters were sustained nothing need be said, unless it be that Mr. Brooke is very respectable as *Simon Renard*, and that Miss Virginia Francis is rather insipid as *Elizabeth*. The songs are retained : an unfortunate circumstance, for they are intrusted to miserably incompetent vocalists.

## C.

## "MISS GWILT."

[Globe Theatre.—April 1876.]

MR. WILKIE COLLINS'S new drama of "Miss Gwilt" is derived from his novel of "Armada," first published in the "Cornhill Magazine" some fourteen years ago. The skill displayed by the author on former occasions when he has converted his stories into plays has not failed him in the present instance, albeit the difficulties encountered are such as might well have deterred and disheartened an adapter of ordinary constitution; for "Armada" is a novel quite exceptional in regard to its elaborateness and complexity. Mr. Collins, however, has dealt with his production after a wisely courageous and unceremonious fashion; he has suppressed very many of his characters, he has thinned the incidents, excised almost every redundant speech, and so pared down the plot that it is invested with a new aspect of simplicity and directness; the result is a drama which, whatever else it may lack, is certainly not deficient in the qualities which secure impressiveness and effect upon the stage. Once more, indeed, Mr. Collins has proved himself a dramatist not less than a novelist. The public may or may not approve "Miss Gwilt," and probably considerable objection will be raised to the uniform unwholesome-

ness of the subject and to the excess of physical horror distinguishing the final scenes ; no playgoer, however, can witness the play without recognising its power to rivet attention and to absorb in the intensest way.

"Miss Gwilt" is in five acts, and "unity of place" is so far regarded that no change of scene occurs in any of the acts, although now and then the stage is divided to allow of the spectators viewing two interiors at once. The first act is mainly devoted to the introduction of the *dramatis personæ* to the audience, and is certainly a little dull, owing to its abundance of explanatory and narrative matter, indispensable, however, to the intelligibility of the intrigue. But when the author has obtained full command over the movements of his puppets, he does not permit them to dally. *Major Milroy* and his daughter are not made interesting, nor can it be said that they ever attain to much semblance of vitality ; while *Armadale* is perhaps even more inane in the play than in the novel, the inferiority of his theatrical representative depriving him even of those personal graces of bearing and look with which he was supposed to be highly endowed. On the stage an air of the counter attends him, and his method of dress is suggestive of the creatures who are known at music-halls as *comiques*. The characters supporting the burden of the story are *Miss Gwilt*, *Dr. Downward*, *Midwinter*, and, in a lesser degree, *Captain Manuel* ; and of these, the villainous doctor is perhaps the most prominent. The play sets forth his project for enriching himself by securing for his ward and accomplice the hand and fortune of *Allan Armadale*. His scheme fails ; for it appears that *Allan Armadale* greatly prefers *Miss Milroy* to *Miss Gwilt* ; and that *Miss Gwilt* herself is inclined much less to *Armadale* than to his friend *Midwinter*. Then comes the discovery that *Midwinter's* real name is



*Armadale*, that the friends are in truth cousins, and that each is not only an *Armadale*, but even an *Allan Armadale*. The doctor forthwith plans that *Miss Gwilt* shall marry *Midwinter*, and that he shall on the occasion of his marriage assume his proper name ; that the two *Armadales* shall then be removed from the scene, when *Miss Gwilt*, armed with her marriage certificate, will be enabled to proclaim herself the widow, not of *Midwinter*, but of the rich *Allan Armadale*, and to secure therefore her share of the wealth he has left behind him ; it being understood that *Dr. Downward* is to benefit considerably by any improvement in the fortunes of *Miss Gwilt*. *Midwinter* and *Miss Gwilt* become man and wife. They are passing their honeymoon at Naples, *Armadale* joining them in his yacht. A certain *Captain Manuel*, a degraded wretch, formerly an officer in the Brazilian navy, who has been an early lover of *Miss Gwilt*, and is well informed of the infamy of her career, has been employed by *Dr. Downward* to effect the destruction of *Armadale*. It occurs to *Manuel* to scuttle *Armadale's* yacht, and for some time belief prevails that both the *Armadales* have been in suchwise disposed of. But again the doctor's schemes undergo discomfiture, *Manuel* is drowned and the *Armadales* escape. The play concludes with the luring of *Armadale* to the doctor's sanatorium at Hendon, and with an exhibition of the attempt made to destroy him by poisoning the air of his bedroom. The drama now closely follows the novel, the curtain descending upon the suicide of *Miss Gwilt* and the apprehension of *Dr. Downward* by the police.

"Miss Gwilt" resembles one of those sombre but exciting dramas of the Boulevards in which crime and criminals figure considerably, and success is sought not so much by enlisting sympathy as by shocking sensibility and appeal-

ing to a love of the terrible. The supply of poisoned air is not confined to the last scene ; the atmosphere throughout is oppressively miasmatic. With the exception of *Midwinter*, the leading characters seem expressly devised to stimulate objection, even to loathing. However, these are the conditions of the novel, and they necessarily accompany the play, although the author has recognised the fact that transfer to the stage has a certain coarsening and heightening influence, and often converts the comparatively unpleasant into the positively insufferable. With this view he has qualified somewhat the odiousness of his heroine, perhaps to the sacrifice in a degree of the harmony and coherence of his original design. The *Miss Gwilt* of the play makes some claim to pity and forbearance : her past is now less guilty than it was ; she expresses contrition for her offences, and her love for her husband is placed beyond question ; at the same time, upon the demands of the story, her penitence yields to an extraordinary vindictiveness. She boldly denies her union with *Midwinter*, and she is most urgent for the death of the inoffensive *Armada*. *Manuel* is the conventional, unscrupulous, unredeemable ruffian of melodrama ; the only marvel in his case is that he could ever have been the favoured lover of *Miss Gwilt* ; and the fact casts a most unpleasant light upon the events of her early life. It is true that *Manuel* is supposed to have undergone many privations and sufferings, and to have fallen desperately from his former estate ; but it is clear that his best must have been bad indeed. *Dr. Downward* is by no means a preferable miscreant ; he is more oily and plausible of manner, and he rather prompts deeds of violence than accomplishes them with his own hands ; but his wickedness is nevertheless of the most abandoned and atrocious kind. The dialogue pretends only to carry on the story

after a matter-of-fact fashion, and is rarely chargeable with superfluity ; it might be well, however, if *Captain Manuel's* jests upon his poverty and his pulmonary disorders were reconsidered, and if certain of *Dr. Downward's* more Peck-sniffian utterances underwent retrenchment ; laughter has a peculiarly jarring effect when it interrupts the critical scenes of serious drama. Altogether "Miss Gwilt" is likely to win the approval of those playgoers who affect entertainments of full flavour and high seasoning. It is, indeed, an acceptable work of its class, but its class is scarcely entitled to plenary admiration.

Miss Cavendish skilfully avails herself of every opportunity permitted by the dramatist. *Miss Gwilt's* hold upon the compassion of the audience is very insecure, and the part is so far an ungrateful one. Yet the adventuress appears in many stirring scenes, and is intrusted with much histrionic duty of moment. Miss Cavendish plays throughout with sound judgment, and oftentimes exhibits genuine power. The later passages of the drama are rendered with an abandonment to the emotions of the scene such as the actress has rarely displayed on former occasions. Mr. Boyne, if he is scarcely the *Midwinter* of the novel, is not deficient in force and intelligence. The *Dr. Downward* of Mr. Cecil is an impersonation of surprising completeness. The actor's every word, look, and gesture assist the representation of the drama ; while unexpected power is revealed in his dealing with the horrors of the last scene.

CL

"CORINNE."

[Lyceum Theatre.—July 1872.]

THE representation of "Corinne," the new romantic drama by Mr. Robert Buchanan, suffers seriously from the conditions commonly attendant upon summer seasons under transient managements. It is clear that the actors have been hastily assembled, and that they are not of proved capacity; that the preparations have been hurried and the rehearsals inadequate. Nor are these deficiencies to be countervailed by the most liberal provision of scenic fittings and adornments. Perhaps success of a complete kind could not be expected for the work under any circumstances, its character and peculiarities being duly considered; but certainly many disappointments might have been spared by a more judicious system of stage management and the securing of players competent to figure in parts of importance. For "Corinne" is a drama of the French romantic school, depending much upon the action of well-drilled auxiliaries, upon the perfect rendering of the details of performance, upon the arts and devices of scene-painters, property-masters, costumiers, and other functionaries contributing to theatrical effect and spectacle; while the leading characters of the play demand at the hands of their

representatives a certain fervour and exaltation of manner and utterance far beyond the reach of our common players. The author deals with stirring events, which are supposed to occur at a most exciting period. The scene is laid in France, and the story is spread over some twelve years. In the earlier scenes the coming Revolution is but a small cloud upon the horizon ; then the storm bursts, and an attempt is made to depict episodes of the Terror, until in the last act the Abbaye prison is shown, with the massacres that occurred at its gates during "the hundred hours." It may be questioned, however, whether Mr. Buchanan's method of treating the Revolution has not rather the effect of unduly limiting or diminishing its significance. Mr. Buchanan, surely founding his fiction upon fact, explains that even so late as 1792 religious prejudices were so strong in France that "members of the artistic professions were not merely denied the rites of burial, but were again and again refused the rites of marriage." By "members of the artistic professions" probably theatrical performers only are referred to ; but this grievance, great as in itself it was, could have played but a small part in urging on the Revolution. After all, very few could have suffered by bigotry and persecution of this miserable sort, and the overturning of the state is not justly to be accounted for by the fact that players were liable to have their marriages annulled by the Church, and were not permitted interment in consecrated ground. Mr. Buchanan's heroine is an actress secretly married to *Victor de Beauvoir*, who afterwards becomes known as the *Comte de Calvador*. Presently *Corinne* and her husband are desirous to make public their union, and to renew their nuptial vows before the altar of Notre Dame de la Garde. But the relations of *Victor* interfere, and obtain important assistance from

the *Abbé de Larose*, whose lawless love *Corinne* had formerly repulsed with scorn, and who is eager for revenge. Accordingly he induces the Archbishop of Paris not only to forbid the public marriage, but to proclaim the former clandestine union of the nobleman and the actress altogether null and void, and to threaten the lovers with the wrath of the Church if they venture to act in contravention of his authority. *Victor* submits to this shameful decree, and quits *Corinne* at the altar, not again to encounter her until many years have elapsed. The youth's conduct is not heroic, but it is intelligible enough, and it is not especially blameworthy. Nevertheless *Victor* is very bitterly regarded both by *Corinne* and her brother *Raoul*, an artist who is occupied with the new ideas, and advocates revolutionary measures, mainly, however, because of personal reasons and out of private pique. He had loved a lady of title, the *Comtesse de la Vallée*, who had trifled with his affections and declined his suit. Thereupon he had vowed vengeance against the whole nobility of France. *Raoul* and the *Abbé* are therefore both vindictively inclined for like causes—the pangs they feel as despised lovers. *Corinne* and *Victor* meet at a fête given by the *Abbé* in the gardens of his chateau in the neighbourhood of Paris, and permit themselves awkward and monotonous misunderstandings. *Victor* believes *Corinne* to be the mistress of the *Abbé*; *Corinne* believes *Victor* to be the lover of the *Comtesse de la Vallée*. These mistakes are of an artificial kind; they are altogether independent of sound sense and adequate evidence. The revolutionary mob, headed by *Raoul*, arrives from Paris; *Corinne* attitudinises with a red flag, and consternation spreads among the guests of the *Abbé*. In the last act *Victor* is seen to be prisoned in the Abbaye, with *Raoul* for his jailor. *Raoul* is the very

weakest of Jacobins. Upon the reappearance of his old love, the *Comtesse de la Vallée*, in the disguise of a peasant girl, he is tempted to betray the cause of the Revolution, and to aid in the escape of the aristocrats. The massacre of the prisoners then commences, the place of Stanislas Maillard, the mock judge of the Abbaye, being filled upon the stage by no less a personage than *Marat* himself, who had appeared in an earlier scene as the horse-leech of the *Comte d'Artois*. One of the earliest victims is the wicked *Abbé de Larose*, whose situation moves him to exhibit the most abject terror. By recourse to a not very likely expedient, the dramatist succeeds in sparing the life of *Victor*; and the curtain falls upon the death of *Corinne*, the result of exhaustion and protracted suffering, both mental and physical.

It would be too much to say that "*Corinne*" is a satisfactory work. The writing is, for the most part, careful, sound, and vigorous, if the inclinings towards poetic diction and sentiment are only intermittent. There is real dramatic power in many of the situations, and the attention of the audience is rarely permitted to flag. But the fable is deficient in compactness, and, while possessing certain interesting qualities of its own, is not especially sympathetic. Mr. Buchanan does not marshal his incidents very adroitly; they assume at times something of a "clubbed" formation; nor does he succeed invariably in rendering them lifelike and credible. His characters are apt to wear a conventional air, and are but faintly outlined, as though drawn by a hand uncertain of its own intention; while their movements seem to be too often of a purposeless and inconsequential kind. *Marat*, for instance, should hardly have been introduced into the play, unless he could be intrusted with a more prominent share in the business of

the scene ; his presence is only a disturbing influence, for he absorbs attention and excites expectation, which, under the circumstances of the case, cannot be gratified. It is always desirable that great names should not be attached to small parts. In the present instance, although the representative of *Marat* plays discreetly and with conscientious forbearance, it is not to be supposed that the portraiture he presents is of an acceptable kind. A practised low comedian, Mr. Atkins is misemployed when he is thrust into such a part. And generally the author suffered because of the shortcomings of his interpreters. In the hands of an actress of any distinction, no doubt the character of *Corinne* might prove theatrically effective in a considerable degree ; but Mrs. Fairfax has scarcely acquired the rudiments of her art. Mr. Forbes Robertson exhibits good intentions as the *Abbé de Larose*. As *Raoul*, Mr. Forrester is unable to find histrionic opportunities ; but the ineffectiveness of the part is perhaps chargeable rather to the author than to the actor. As *Victor de Beauvoir* Mr. Warner is animated and emotional enough, displaying unexpected pathos in the prison scene.



## CII.

## "PERIL."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—October 1876.]

M. SARDOU'S "*Nos Intimes*," of which "*Peril*" is an adaptation, is a familiar work in this country. It was represented here in 1871 by a French company, which included Mdlle. Fargueil, MM. Parade, Delannoy, and Brindeau; and already English versions of the comedy—called "*Friends and Foes*" and "*Our Friends*" respectively—had been produced at the St. James's and Olympic Theatres. For the Prince of Wales's Theatre "*Nos Intimes*" has been translated anew by authors calling themselves Messrs. Saville and Bolton Rowe, names that savour of harlequinade humour.

M. Sardou cannot boast the wit of M. Dumas, but then he is not burdened with those curious didactic ambitions which form a distracting element in the works of the author of "*La Dame aux Camélias*." M. Sardou is a humorist with a strong tendency towards caricature; he is bent upon diverting his audience at all costs. If, in such wise, his art suffers, so much the worse for his art. Of his comedies it may be said generally that they each contain a great variety of characters, many amusing incidents, one impressive situation, and a weak last act in which an incoherent

story is brought to an unsatisfactory conclusion. He is certainly adroit in shifting his *dramatis personæ* hither and thither, so that while they crowd the stage they do not confuse the spectator; but they have often no distinct mission in the play, and seem to pertain rather to one of those "entertainments" in which eccentric figures are formally and successively introduced, but own no real relationship to each other. In "Nos Intimes" he has endeavoured to set forth the experiences of a man with many friends and the trouble they occasion him. He entertains them at his country-house, and they repay his hospitality with the grossest ingratitude. They malign and insult him; they find fault with his every proceeding; they labour to make him wretched; one of the party, indeed, seeks to seduce from him the affections of his young wife. He is convinced at last of the true nature of his guests, and rejoices greatly when his house is rid of them. The teaching of the story, so far as it may be supposed to teach anything, is to the cynical effect that friendship is a delusion, and that a man's bitterest foes are those with whom he seems most intimate, and to whom he has been unceasingly kind and generous. No doubt M. Sardou would disclaim any moral purpose whatever; he presents a caricature for his audience to laugh at, and that duty done, there is an end of his thoughts and wishes on the subject. But the absence of sincerity on the part of the dramatist leads to lack of sympathy on the part of the spectators. They fail to interest themselves in events which the author has taken pains to invest with an unreal air. They are enabled to set their own practical experiences of life in opposition to his extravagant opinions, and the result tends to his discomfiture. The personages and occurrences of "Nos Intimes" are repellent to belief. It is perceived promptly that no

such country gentleman as M. Sardou's hero ever existed—that such a strangely conducted country-house as his is inconceivable, and that the friends who plague him, if probable in any degree, are not probable as guests in the abode of a sane man. For it is to be noted that these despicable creatures do not claim kindred with their host, the tie of blood being usually accepted as a tolerable explanation of much rudeness of demeanour and speech; they behave shamefully, because they call themselves and he calls them his friends, and for no other reason. But who has any pity to spare for a man with odious friends? He is a fool both for making them and for not breaking with them.

At the Prince of Wales's Theatre the scene of "Nos Intimes" is transferred from France to England, and the *dramatis personæ* boast English names. But it is difficult to change the *venue* and the citizenship of French comedy and its characters. No pains have been spared, and indeed considerable ingenuity has been exercised in the matter; but, at most, the play has been denationalised somewhat. An artificial view of French life and manner and idiosyncrasy is hardly to be converted into an acceptable picture of English society. Throughout the play it is felt that the characters, the motives swaying them, the situations in which they appear, the relationship they bear to each other, the air they breathe, are not of Britannic nature. The masquerade may be clever enough and well sustained, but every domino hides a Frenchman. The hero no longer shoots a fox that preys upon his poultry, but a hare that nibbles his carnations. In one of Mr. Du Maurier's pleasant illustrations of nursery humours certain children are seen discussing the why and the wherefore of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. "Perhaps they shot a fox," suggests little Jack, the squire's

son. No such utterance could have proceeded from a French child. No social law makes vulpicide a crime in France. But the incident, even with its change of animals, fails in effect upon the English stage. The dramatist seems to be ridiculing the interest he had exerted himself to excite, and a consequent sense of injury afflicts the spectators; their regard has been obtained from them by false pretences. A husband with good reason to be jealous is supposed to be lying in wait to assassinate his wife's lover; in truth, he is only making extraordinary exertions to slaughter a hare that destroys his flowers! So trivial an explanation of conduct that seemed to be so serious is an affront to the lookers-on. But this is M. Sardou's way. The love scenes between *Lady Ormond* and *Captain Bradford* would seem to demand grave treatment at the hands of the dramatist. A friend is betraying his trust, a wife is perilling her honour, a home is about to be wrecked. Yet M. Sardou views the position as farcical and absurd. The lady is allowed to suppose that her lover suffers from heart disease; she is eager on that account to subdue his excitement; she believes that his protests will induce aneurism, that if he kneels at her feet he will expire there. The audience laugh, as they well may, for the scene is most amusing; but it makes havoc of the story. M. Sardou, however, is quite content to purchase incidental effect at the expense of general interest. In the same way the characters, laboriously introduced, labelled as it were with certain peculiarities or special infirmities, readily abandon these after they have met with due recognition. *Sir Woodbine Grafton*, for instance, a querulous, selfish, East Indian Civil servant, with a disordered liver and a dreadful temper, completely loses his individuality as the play progresses. He is no longer to be distinguished from *Sir George*

Ormond's other ill-conditioned friend, the lawyer *Mr. Crossley Beck*.

It must not be supposed, however, that "Peril" fails to entertain. In truth it pleases greatly, if rather as a farce than as a portrayal of fact, scarcely a dissentient voice interfering with the cordiality of its reception. It has been set upon the stage with a carefulness and a regard for detail only impeachable on the score of laboriousness and excess. The oak hall at Ormond Court, with its staircase, fireplace, bay-window, carvings, armour, and trophies of arms, is a triumph of scenic decoration. It is very picturesque, and, moreover, possesses that draughty look which often attends the interiors of ancient mansions. The luxurious boudoir of Lady Ormond is marked by an eccentric tastefulness that is probably secure of sympathy in these times. The decorations, however, suggest an ornithological craziness on the part of her Ladyship unaccounted for by anything in the comedy. The acting is throughout excellent. As an original portrait, the *Sir Woodbine Grafton* of Mr. Arthur Cecil deserves special mention, with an expression of regret that, owing to no fault of the actor's, the character declines in force as the play proceeds, and sinks at last into mere commonplace. Miss Robertson, if in the earlier scenes inclined to excess of artificial airs and graces, displays genuine power in the third act, when *Lady Ormond* repels the advances her indiscretion had justified. Mr. Bancroft is a satisfactory representative of the rather unsatisfactory character of *Sir George*. Mr. Charles Sugden appears commendably as *Captain Bradford*; and Mr. W. Younge, a very youthful actor, obtains deserved applause as *Percy Grafton*, *Sir Woodbine's* son, a precocious schoolboy, who reads Boccaccio, and suffers much from attempting to smoke a

Trichinopoly cheroot. The peevish couple, *Mr. and Mrs. Crossley Beck*, are forcibly presented by Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Leigh Murray; and Mr. Kendal, wearing a wig of an unnatural flaxen hue, plays with great spirit *Dr. Thornton*, a homœopathic physician who administers quite allopathic doses of good counsel to his patients. Miss Buckstone personates with grace and intelligence *Lucy Ormond*, *Sir George's* daughter, who ultimately becomes the wife of *Dr. Thornton*.

## CIII.

## "RICHARD III."

[Lyceum Theatre.—February 1877.]

THE restoration to the stage of Shakspeare's "Richard III." reflects credit upon the Lyceum management.

"The only rule," writes Hazlitt, "for altering Shakspeare is to retrench certain passages which may be considered either superfluous or obsolete, but not to add or transpose anything." At the Lyceum no additions are made to the text, but the retrenchments are very considerable, while, chiefly in order to avoid too frequent shifting of the scenes, there occurs occasional transposition of the incidents. Here and there, too, may be noted a certain indefensible system of culling effective lines from the suppressed scenes to enrich the preserved portions of the play. Probably no two students of the poet could come to precise agreement as to the passages they would omit from his text. The method of condensation adopted at the Lyceum Theatre has certainly produced an effective acting drama, in the course of which no line is spoken which is not contained in Shakspeare's play. And the fact that the Lyceum company includes several very inefficient performers may be accepted as a sufficient reason for the excision of much matter which otherwise might well have been re-

tained. If, for instance, we are to have a ranting *Duke of Clarence*, it seems but prudent to limit his opportunities of speech; and so, considering the monotonous violence of Miss Bateman's *Margaret of Anjou*, there is sound judgment manifested in the elimination of that vociferous character from the later acts of the tragedy. In truth, the adequate representation of one of Shakspeare's histories demands the combination of more performers of the first class than can now be readily assembled in a London theatre.

The revival greatly interested the audience; but it must be confessed that the assumption of a new and arduous part by Mr. Irving was generally viewed as a matter of still more importance. Of late there has been a measure of decline in the fervour of the reception awarded to Mr. Irving's performances of Shakspeare. It is, of course, difficult to maintain enthusiasm at its first fever-heat, and reaction is apt to follow upon emotional excesses. But if there has been any failure on the part of the actor, some fickleness should certainly be charged against his public. The ardent admirers of his *Hamlet* should certainly have shown themselves more content than they confessed themselves with both his *Macbeth* and his *Othello*, seeing that all three impersonations were closely united by similarity of intellectual view and histrionic method. But the charm of novelty perhaps made its absence seriously felt; and frequent performance, nightly wear and tear, seemed to affect the tragedian injuriously, heightening the defects and extravagances of his manner of art. As *Richard*, however, it is likely that Mr. Irving may regain any favour he has forfeited, and even attach to himself a section of critical opinion that has held itself unsympathetically aloof from his Shakspearian efforts. Those confirmed habits or tricks of accent



or pronunciation, of gesture, of gait, of facial expression, hitherto denounced as disfiguring "mannerisms," are not out of harmony with the individuality of *Richard*; for *Richard* is very much of what actors call a "character part," and permits of the minute and special rendering of personal and physical traits and peculiarities. *Gloster* enters immediately upon the rising of the curtain; there is no need to prepare the minds of the spectators in regard to him, for his character has been sufficiently exhibited and developed in the Second and Third Parts of "King Henry VI." Mr. Irving, looking very like *Louis XI.*, is content to represent the deformity of "hard-favoured" *Richard* by means merely of rounded shoulders and a halting walk. In the earlier scenes there is some want of repose and repression. *Richard*, who has proclaimed, "I am myself alone," and avowed that he has "neither pity, love, nor fear," seems deficient in mental fortitude, in self-confidence and sufficiency. But the actor is assuredly to be excused for any nervousness that may have interfered with his intentions, or led to an unequal expenditure of his resources. At present his impersonation suffers from over-emphasis and excess of elaboration; and yet these defects are really merits, in so far as they indicate his devoted study of his text, his desire that no line or point of it should fail in effect through lack of zeal or painstaking on his part. The incredible scene of the wooing of *Lady Anne* is skilfully represented, and admirable art is displayed in *Gloster's* dealings with the kinsfolk of the *Queen* and in his encounter with *Margaret of Anjou*. It is to be noted that *Richard*, in right of the intensity and thoroughness of his villany, always commands the favour, admiration, and even a measure of the sympathy of his audience; they are carried away by his superb force of character; they perceive that

the other *dramatis personæ* are but puppets in his hands, and that he is very fully possessed of the kingly attributes of sagacity, energy, indomitable courage, and signal power of command, the while he is endowed with an appreciation of humour that is even in advance of *Iago's* sense of jocosity. Mr. Irving capitally depicts *Richard's* enjoyment of his own villany, and of the mocks and jibes and insults he heaps upon friends and foes alike. Hypocrisy has always a comic leaven upon the stage, and *Richard's* powers of dissimulation, his ability to "wet his cheeks with artificial tears and frame his face to all occasions," his affectation of religion and piety—notably in the scene with the *Lord Mayor*—are represented with extraordinary fulness and force, and win very cordial applause. The rebuke of *Buckingham* is no longer delivered as a wild burst of passion, but, much more judiciously, is spoken with considerable calmness, and yet with a malignant, bitter, and menacing contempt that is extremely effective. Throughout the play, indeed, the desire of the actor appears to be to depict *Richard* not as the petulant, vapouring, capering, detonating creature he has so long been represented in the theatre, but as an arch and polished dissembler, the grimmest of jesters, the most subtle and the most merciless of assassins and conspirators, aiming directly at the crown, and ridding himself one by one of every obstacle appearing on his path thitherward—"hewing his way out with a bloody axe," smiling and "murdering while he smiles"—and gifted or afflicted with a certain diabolical delight in his own enormities. At the same time it should be stated that the scenes really demanding passionate interpretation, such as the arrest and condemnation of *Hastings*, the bearing of *Richard* upon the interception of his march, and his treatment of the messengers

bringing tidings of the successful advance of *Richmond*, were rendered with sufficient force. Exhaustion of voice and a rather hysterical display of remorse weakened the effect of the tent-scene. Here *Richard* seemed embarrassed with the velvet and ermined robes he had carried with him from Westminster to Bosworth Field, and too much disposed to make strange attitude and curious gesticulation serve as means of depicting anguish of mind and the pangs of a guilty conscience. The performance will without doubt gain by the further consideration the artist can now bring to his undertaking; experience will teach him to economise his forces, to reduce the inequalities of his portraiture, and to rid himself of the minor defects of redundant action and excessive play of face. But as it stands, this representation of Shakspeare's *Richard* may surely take its place among the most remarkable of histrionic achievements. As an actor's first impersonation of a part entirely new to him, it is startling in its originality, its power, and completeness.

CIV.

"ARTFUL CARDS."

[Gaiety Theatre.—February 1877.]

"ARTFUL CARDS" is the inelegant title of Mr. Burnand's "new farcical comedy," which owes its existence to the Palais Royal play of "*La Clé*," by MM. Duru and Labiche. The hero of the story is a *Mr. Spicer Rumford*, a weak gentleman with a foolish fondness for dissipation, whose limited means, however, forbid much indulgence of his tastes in that respect. He is married to a rich wife; but *Mrs. Rumford* has absolute control of her fortune, holds the purse-strings very tightly, and allows him a rather paltry income. *Mr. Rumford* tries hard, by "cooking" his accounts and by carneying protestations, to extract further payments from his wife; but she is very suspicious of his good faith, and has indeed sufficient reason to distrust professions of love which are invariably accompanied by applications for money. The play sets forth the nocturnal misadventures of *Mr. Rumford* upon an occasion when he has eluded his wife's vigilance, and, professing to be engaged in important legal business, has really visited a beautiful Polish Countess at her lodgings in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. The *Countess Asteriski* is an adventuress of a very bad class. She is in league with a

gang of desperadoes, who, pretending to be foreign noblemen, keep a gaming-table, and victimise all they can lure to their board of green cloth. *Mr. Rumford* is easily induced to play, and is at first, to his great delight, permitted to win largely; but presently he finds himself a loser to a considerable amount. He is stripped, not only of all the money in his immediate possession, but also of his watch and chain, and is constrained to give his note of hand in acknowledgment of his further liabilities. The gambling-house is entered by the police, but detection is avoided by the sudden conversion of the roulette-table into a piano and the assumption of musical instruments by the gamblers, so that the constables have the air of interrupting a harmless concert. It is thought prudent, however, that the company should disperse; and soon *Mr. Rumford*, much flushed and confused from the effects of the Countess's champagne, finds himself in Piccadilly, wearing an Ulster coat that clearly belongs to a much taller man, and still carrying the trombone he had snatched up on the entry of the police into the gambling-house. He has no money to pay for a cab to his home in the Avenue Road, nor is he able to reward a friendly policeman, who relieves him of the inconvenient trombone. But *Mr. Rumford's* distresses need not be related further in detail. He arrives home at last in a very soiled and troubled state, to submit to severe cross-examination at the hands of his wife; his answers and explanations being of the most hopelessly entangled and contradictory kind. However, *Mrs. Rumford* is not altogether blameless; it is shown that in her husband's absence she had attended an appointment with a foreigner in Kensington Gardens to pay a large sum of money in exchange for certain compromising letters. There ensues a sort of mutual hushing up

of the peccadilloes of both husband and wife ; an amnesty is proclaimed, forgiveness is interchanged, and the play ends with *Mr. Rumford's* recovery, in some rather unintelligible way, of the money lost to the Countess and her confederates at the Leicester Square gambling-house.

"Artful Cards" is endowed with all the absurdities of farce, but it is not without the diverting qualities of that class of production. The story is indeed scarcely more reasonable or conceivable than the plot of a pantomime, and yet it is very successful in moving the spectators to laughter. The incidents are oftentimes in themselves exceedingly droll, and Mr. Burnand has enriched the dialogue of the original with an abundance of jests, of the odd, vivacious, good-humoured kind peculiar to himself. But no doubt the play is mainly indebted for the very favourable reception it met with to the popularity of Mr. Toole and to his extraordinary exertions in the part of *Spicer Rumford*. Mr. Toole, it need hardly be said, is a practised interpreter of farce, and is able to make the most of every comical opportunity ; but there is always a sort of natural foundation for his exuberant humour ; the growth may be luxuriant and eccentric, but the stock is of a simple and homely sort ; and something recognisable as life-like and real is discernible even in the wildest of his freaks and frolics. In the first act little incident occurs ; he has to appear only as a hen-pecked husband anxious to conciliate and extract money from his rich and rather acrid partner, while bent upon a night of lively entertainment with his nephew *Fred Flutter*. But in the second act, the scene representing the drawing-room of the *Countess Asteriski*, *Mr. Spicer Rumford* is perceived to be a figure scarcely less ludicrous and grotesque than the waiter in the last act of "Tottle's."

*Mr. Rumford* has hurriedly attired himself in a dress-suit that does not fit him ; he has misgivings that are not without warrant as to the shape and position of his white tie ; his shirt-studs have betrayed him and abandoned their proper posts—he suspects them of wriggling down into his dress-boots ; he would conceal their defection by holding his hand upon his breast, but unfortunately his cheap kid gloves—of course very much too long in the fingers—have split in the most disastrous way, and through their rents his red knuckles are painfully revealed. But the reader can picture to himself *Mr. Toole's* struggles with these difficulties of dress and deportment, and can further imagine the comedian's appearance when he enters Piccadilly, with a broken hat and muddy boots, oppressed with a trombone, and wearing an Ulster coat of undue length. His interview with the policeman is the next absurdity, and then follows his furtive return home and his desperate attempts to convince his suspicious wife of the reasonableness of his extravagant conduct. These exploits secured the complete success of the representation.

CV.

"ROBERT MACAIRE."

[Gaiety Theatre.—February 1877.]

THE once-famous melodrama of "Robert Macaire," is now presented in a compressed form and with excision of its more startling incidents. There is "a time to sleep" for melodramas as for other things, and "Robert Macaire" is fast passing away to that crowded shelf from which plays are not taken down again. The success enjoyed by the production upon its first appearance some fifty years ago was not due to its own merits, but rather to the talent for gag and *blague* of its early representatives—mainly, indeed, to the remarkable force, humour, and histrionic genius of Frédéric Lemaître. He was quick to perceive that the conventional cut-throat of the theatre, such as the dramatist had intended him to represent, was no longer secure of applause; was likely, indeed, to be received with censure; and thereupon he invented the extraordinary combination of jocosity and ruffianism, of grand airs and ragged garments, of burlesque and tragedy, which, in the person of *Robert Macaire*, came upon the stage as a new revelation. The traditions of Lemaître are so far respected at the Gaiety that *Robert* is dressed after the original fashion—he remains true to his tattered and patched red pantaloons,



his fragmentary gloves, and his very long-tailed coat; he dances with his old agility, wields his bludgeon dexterously as of yore, and still takes snuff out of the circular box, whose squeaking lid always brings to the mind of *Jacques Strop* terrible suggestions of the creaking of the guillotine; but in truth the vitality of the play is almost extinct. "Robert Macaire" was last seen in London about ten years ago, when Mr. Fechter was tenant of the Lyceum Theatre; his *Robert*, however, was not one of his best efforts, and he obtained less applause than did Mr. Widcomb, the *Jacques Strop* of the performance. At the Gaiety, Mr. Collette is vigorous and animated, although he is without the depth of tragic power which should underlie the levity of *Robert Macaire*, and impress the audience with a sense of his absoluteness and enormity as a malefactor. In the part of *Jacques Strop* Mr. Toole displays very singular grotesque force. It is understood that eccentricity of every kind is consistent with a proper representation of this character. Mr. Toole fully avails himself of the privilege thus permitted him—he is the personification of wild caricature; he revels in the utmost extravagance of speech, attitude, and gesture. At the same time in his portrayal of nervous agitation and convulsive panic there are touches of fantastic art within the reach of few living actors of comedy, or indeed of tragedy either. The favour now extended to "Robert Macaire" is entirely due to the surprising performance of the representative of *Jacques Strop*; otherwise the play only subsists as a curious relic of the past. That it will survive to any very distant date is hardly to be expected, nor indeed much to be desired.

CVI.

"THE VICARAGE."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—April 1877.]

SOME five-and-twenty years ago "The Cosy Couple," an English version of M. Octave Feuillet's "Le Village," was produced at the Lyceum Theatre, then under the management of Madame Vestris. The adapter was Mr. George H. Lewes—"Mr. Slingsby Lawrence," as he was wont to designate himself in those days; the players were Mr. Charles Mathews and the late Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews; and the scenic accessories were most tasteful and complete—for Madame Vestris had greatly reformed the manners and customs of the theatre in that regard. The little drama afforded the liveliest satisfaction to the public, and enjoyed many representations. Nevertheless "The Cosy Couple" is not very well remembered in these times, or it would hardly have been thought necessary to translate "Le Village" anew, and to reproduce the work as "The Vicarage, a Fireside Story," at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. It may be said at once, however, that the adapter, "Mr. Saville Rowe," has accomplished his supererogatory task creditably enough, if he has sometimes appeared perplexed between a desire to be real and colloquial in his dialogues, and a disposition to indulge in speeches of high-flown quality. The main defects of "The Vicarage" are, in

truth, due to "Le Village," which is not so much a play as a little anecdote related in a dramatic fashion. M. Feuillet could hardly in the first instance have contemplated the representation of "Le Village" upon the stage; the story is so unsubstantial and artificial. There is a graceful ingenuity worthy of the author in his notion of the traveller's tales of adventure and enterprise disturbing the domestic peace and unsettling the minds of his two old friends, who lead secluded lives in a remote provincial district; but the theme seems to shrivel up before the fierce light of the stage-lamps, falls lifeless when attempt is made to embody it in a theatre. It becomes necessary for histrionic purposes to heighten the distresses of the story, until its unreality and incredibility stand too plainly revealed, sensibility is perceived to be running to seed, and the sentiment of the situation is discovered to be false. Moreover, a painfully discordant note is struck when the traveller is supposed to be moved by a spirit of revenge, and would part the attached husband and wife, simply because thirty years before the lady had rejected his addresses as a lover. Even when M. Feuillet's work was first performed, it was felt that his facts had been unduly strained for the sake of stage effect; but what was untrue then in "Le Village" is still more untrue now in "The Vicarage." The story would probably have attached more belief to itself if it had been considerably antedated and far removed from comparison with the conditions of modern existence; if its events had been referred, for instance, to the last century, and the characters had assumed hair-powder and shoe-buckles. It is impossible to credit that a modern clergyman of middle age, however retired may be his manner of life, could bring about such serious perturbation as does the *Rev. Mr. Haygarth* in "The Vicarage," by a simple proposal to

spend a three weeks' holiday upon the Continent. *Mrs. Haygarth*, objecting to separate from her husband even for so brief a period, might fairly offer to accompany him ; but she avoids so obvious a course, and prefers to plunge into the deepest sorrow, pining over the thought that her husband is unhappy, and that she has failed in her wifely duty of making his home comfortable and agreeable to him. "The Vicarage" had the advantage of careful representation before a well-disposed audience, and moved as much commiseration perhaps as the imperfect nature of the subject would permit ; yet the performers must surely have felt themselves somewhat removed from the range of legitimate sympathy. The few playgoers present who bore in mind "The Cosy Couple" no doubt preferred that earlier version, in which care was taken to dwell rather upon the humours than the dolours of the story ; its pleasantness and sprightliness were insisted on, and its pathos underwent no suppression, only it was not played *forte*, as at the Prince of Wales's Theatre ; the play was altogether less solemn in tone, and therefore more thoroughly satisfactory. Mr. Kendal undertakes the part formerly filled by Mr. Charles Mathews, and spares no pains to portray the travelled bachelor, who is now called *Mr. George Clarke, C.B.* ; the actor has not yet contrived, however, to suit his histrionic method to the limited area of the theatre, and is needlessly boisterous and gesticulatory. Mr. Arthur Cecil is a most lifelike representative of the country clergyman, *Mr. Haygarth* ; and upon the character of the vicar's wife, which lies apart from her ordinary occupation upon the stage, Mrs. Bancroft brings to bear her most refined art, performs with all that command of pathetic expression, sensitive play of face, and musical management of voice, for which she has been justly applauded on so many previous occasions.

## CVII.

## "LONDON ASSURANCE."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—April 1877.]

"LONDON ASSURANCE" has undergone revision on the part of its author, and is now, by compression of the later and weaker scenes, played in four acts instead of five. The comedy, which dates from 1841, and may be accounted Mr. Boucicault's "*Vivian Grey*," enjoyed upon its first production the support of a specially strong company; but the extraordinary success of the work was not solely due to that fact, for it has scarcely pleased in a less degree when represented by far inferior performers. As the first work of a very young writer, "*London Assurance*" is surely without its compeer in the whole of our dramatic repertory; its literary merits are considerable, and the perception of theatrical effectiveness disclosed by the work in its every scene is most surprising. It is not of course pretended that nature has been very closely followed by the author; in its portrayal of real life and manners "*London Assurance*" is as faithful or as faithless now as ever it was. Some concession has been made to the changes wrought by time and fashion—the characters now make mention of express trains where once they spoke of post-horses, and refer to the opera where originally they talked

of the ballet—otherwise the dialogue has been but little altered. Indeed, it would have been well if, while Mr. Boucicault was engaged in the task of revision, he had struck his pen through certain exuberant passages, which can scarcely be so dear to him now as once they were, perhaps, and which too much resemble dead boughs upon a tree that is in other respects fairly sound. But in 1841 it was hardly possible for a young dramatist to avoid the flowers and figures of speech which Sheridan Knowles had rendered popular, and to this we owe without doubt the strange rhapsodies of which Mr. Boucicault's *dramatis personæ* are from time to time delivered. *Max Harkaway* still gives vent to his astounding description of "the chase in full cry;" *Charles Courtley* is as liberal with his rhodomontade as heretofore; and *Grace* is still permitted to speak of "the first tear that glistens in the opening eye of morning," "the silent song breathed by the flowers,"—an Irish melody without doubt,—"the thrilly choir of the woodland minstrels, to which the modest brook trickles applause," and to retain her extraordinary account of *Lady Gay*: "Nature in some frolic mood shut up a merry devil in her eye, and spiting Art, stole joy's brightest harmony to thrill her laugh, which peals out sorrow's knell"—with much more wordy trash of the same sort. It is to be understood, however, that "London Assurance" is a comedy of high spirits. The characters were at no time new to the stage, but they were admirably suited to their first representatives; and perhaps in 1841 languor and apathy were not such prevalent moods and affectations as in these later days. Something of what may be called Tom-and-Jerryism still survived, or *Charles Courtly* would not have entered in quite so inebrious a condition, nor would he have appropriated so freely the door-knockers of his neigh-

bours. The success of the representation at the Prince of Wales's Theatre demonstrates the vitality of "London Assurance;" certainly it has survived the departure of the comedies by the same hand that followed it. "The School for Scheming," "Old Heads and Young Hearts," "Alma Mater," "Love in a Maze," "The Irish Heiress," seem to have vanished altogether from the stage. The performers who most distinguish themselves are those whose air of natural gaiety best qualifies them for the hilarious and frolicsome duties devolving upon them. Mrs. Bancroft plays *Pert* with charming brightness and sauciness; and Mr. Honey as *Mark Meddle* displays abundant comicality and grotesqueness. Mr. Arthur Cecil provides an artistic impersonation of *Sir Harcourt Courtly*; and the valet, *Cool*, is represented in a very lifelike manner by Mr. Sugden. Mr. Bancroft's *Dazzle* may be credited with energy, good-humour, and good intentions, at any rate; and Mr. Kendal, though inclined to over-act, is yet to be viewed as a competent *Charles Courtly*. Mrs. Kendal is scarcely seen to advantage as *Lady Gay*; and certainly Mr. Kemble is rather dull than droll as *Dolly Spanker*. But the representation generally seemed to afford satisfaction to the audience.

CVIII.

"THE LYONS MAIL."

[Lyceum Theatre.—May 1877.]

THE old melodrama of "The Courier of Lyons" endures and thrives less because it is founded upon fact, and traces its source to a real *cause célèbre* of the days of the Directory, than by reason of its rapid action, its exciting incidents, and the opportunity it provides for the accomplishment of a sort of histrionic exploit. First represented at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, Paris, in 1850, the play underwent adaptation at the hands of Mr. Charles Reade, and was produced by Mr. Charles Kean at the Princess's Theatre in 1854. With the new title of "The Lyons Mail," it has now been revived in order that Mr. Irving, following Mr. Kean's example, may sustain the two characters of the worthy *M.<sup>r</sup> Lesurques* and the villanous *Dubosc*. In Paris the dramatist, divided between his regard for truth and his sense of poetical justice, supplied the work with two terminations. If on one night *M. Lesurques* was hurried to the guillotine, on the next a reprieve arrived, his life was spared, and *Dubosc* was understood to suffer in his stead; just as, two centuries ago, it was the fashion of the English stage to end "Romeo and Juliet" now as a tragedy, with the sacrifice of the lovers, and now as a



comedy, with their happy marriage. Mr. Charles Reade has disdained compromise of this kind, sharing perhaps the Laureate's repugnance for "a lie which is half a truth." In "The Lyons Mail" at the Lyceum, as in "The Courier of Lyons" at the Princess's, the real nature of the catastrophe has been wholly disregarded; the play concludes as the audience would have it conclude—in the approved way, with the escape of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty. In the theatre the requirements of fiction may not be neglected; and if facts stand in the way—so much the worse for the facts!

The intrinsic qualities of the work are not remarkable; it does not aim at literary distinction, it has been denied the relief of humour, and it presents no heroine strongly appealing to sympathy. But the play is ingeniously contrived in regard to the "dual impersonation," for the sake of which it really exists, and certainly the story interests in spite, if not because, of the violence and rudeness of its transactions. Productions of this class are not to be subjected to the rules governing classical or poetic tragedy. The melodramatic *Medea* is well entitled to slay her children before the people, and indeed to make very clear to the pit the thoroughness of the butchery; the crimes of the cut-throat *Dubosc* are not held to be by any means too horrible for achievement in the presence of the audience. Certainly there is rather a slaughter-house air about certain of the incidents, such as the stabbing of *Jeanne*, the wretched woman whom *Dubosc* has betrayed and plundered, and the brutal murder of the postilion and guard of the mail-coach; but the purveyor of melodrama feels himself bound to thrill his public, to make their blood curdle and their flesh creep, by any expedients that may occur to him. "The Lyons Mail," however, is raised somewhat above

ordinary melodrama, owing to the peculiarity of its construction, and the necessity for the two characters of *Lesurques* and *Dubosc* being impersonated by the same actor. On this account performers of eminence have lent their aid to a production which otherwise they could scarcely have countenanced. There is art of course in this feat of portraying alternately vice and virtue, if it may be removed somewhat from "the purpose of playing," and if it directs the regard of the audience less to the drama itself than to one of the conditions of its representation. The question of identity has to be presented in a very practical form to the spectators; the actor is required to pass rapidly from one character to the other; to depict with the same brush, and almost at the same moment, physical likeness and moral unlikeness. Mr. Charles Kean's efforts in this respect were highly successful; Mr. Irving's performance is as fully deserving of applause. As an actor, Mr. Irving is characterised by peculiarities of aspect, gait, and demeanour which are not readily laid aside, and might be thought to interfere with his present undertaking, and to render the resemblance existing between *Dubosc* and *Lesurques* too striking for credibility or for the purposes of the drama. But the actor is able to overcome all difficulty of this kind; his *Dubosc* resembles his *Lesurques* only in stature and in shape of features. It may be, indeed, that Mr. Irving, adhering to the traditional method of personating the characters, renders them too dissimilar—either lays excess of stress upon the refinement, the elegance, and the dignity of *Lesurques*, or else exaggerates the coarseness and the brutality of *Dubosc*. Hardened criminal as he is, *Dubosc* is yet the captain, the intellect, and the master-spirit of the gang of robbers; something of the highwayman of the last century—the rude gaiety, the

brave bearing, of *Captain Macheath* for instance, may possibly have distinguished him. Likeness does not depend merely upon trick of face; it rests considerably upon general air and bearing. In "The Lyons Mail" the audience are left unconvinced by the persistency of the witnesses as to the identity of the characters; they are not really so much alike as they are stated to be; in truth the actor displays more versatility than is required. Mr. Irving's greatest success is obtained in the second act; he represents powerfully *Lesurques'* anguish of mind when the proof of his guilt strengthens more and more, and *Jerome*, his father, denounces him as an assassin, and proposes to him suicide as the only escape from infamy. The actor's exertions were rewarded by frequent and well-merited applause. The reception of the play was, indeed, most enthusiastic.

CIX.

"THE MOONSTONE."

[Olympic Theatre.—September 1877.]

THE new drama of "The Moonstone," which Mr. Wilkie Collins has founded upon his famous novel of that name, is perhaps more ingenious than interesting. The story in the course of its transfer to the stage has undergone considerable change, and especially suffers by the suppression of its more romantic qualities. The great yellow diamond stolen from the forehead of the God of the Moon at the siege of Seringapatam has been deprived of its supernatural attributes; it is no longer an object of veneration to mysterious Brahmins pertinaciously seeking for it, and capable of any crime in their anxiety to repossess it; the play presents matters after a more prosaic fashion, and greatly reduces the value of the gem as a means of impressing and exciting. It is now simply a precious stone, endowed with little more historic interest than attaches to any other diamond contained in a jeweller's shop; it is appropriated for a time by a gentleman in a somnambulistic state as the result of an indigestible supper; but it is ultimately recovered, and is destined, we learn, as the curtain falls, not to adorn again the forehead of the Indian idol, but to be broken up for the benefit of the poor. The incidents of

the novel have, indeed, undergone a general process of simplification, retrenchment, and reform. *Franklin Blake* is no longer plied with opium ; no Ezra Jennings appears to startle people with his piebald hair, and to dissolve the mystery of the plot by registering the delirious ravings of Mr. Candy, the Frizinghall general practitioner ; and all mention is forborne of the eccentric housemaid Rosanna Spearman, whose unrequited passion for *Franklin* led to her secreting the smeared nightgown which proved his guilt in a japanned tin case buried in the Shivering Sand. Altogether, the drama gratifies less than the novel ; the subject is better suited to narration than to representation. It is perhaps a defect in Mr. Collins's art, when it becomes to be applied to the purposes of the stage, that it leaves nothing to the imagination of the audience ; every incident in the story is formally set forth and fully proved, as it were, upon oath, like evidence in a court of justice ; each link in the chain of events is duly forged, welded, and perfected. There is an artistic conscientiousness about this system of composition which tends greatly to the convincing and charming of the reader, who is far less disposed than is the playgoer to meet the author half-way, to take things for granted, and to connive cordially at his own illusion. Readers may be said to exercise the functions of a jury, and to pronounce a sober verdict upon circumstances that have been strictly and legally demonstrated ; whereas playgoers more nearly resemble the irresponsible lookers-on in court, who are privileged to rush at random conclusions, to be swayed hither and thither by their prepossessions, and to applaud anything that happens to please them at the moment. A certain tediousness afflicts at intervals the play of "*The Moonstone*" from the dramatist's devotion to circumstantial relation. It is somewhat trying to have to

listen while curious cases are cited in proof of the phenomena of somnambulism, and extracts are read from such works as Combe on "Phrenology" or Elliotson's "Human Physiology" in reference to diseased brains or disordered stomachs. But it is only fair to add that when the conditions under which Mr. Collins elects to write allow of his being dramatic, he is very dramatic indeed. The scene, for instance, in the third act where *Rachel* denounces her lover as a thief, and treats with pitiless scorn his protestations of innocence, is admirably forcible and effective. And generally it may be said that the author has displayed excellent skill in contriving a compact drama out of such superabundant materials. There is no incoherence or unintelligibility; the spectator is never required to refer to the book to obtain comprehension of the play. Mr. Collins's constructive power has even tempted him to unusual regard for the prescriptions of the classical drama. The scene, representing the inner hall of *Miss Verinder's* country-house, remains unchanged throughout, and the action is confined to a period of twenty-four hours.

"The Moonstone" is carefully, and sometimes very effectively, represented; the players so far following the author as to be thoroughly dramatic when he permits them, and in some degree dull when he is too prosily insistent upon detail. Miss Pateman seemed at first content to be but a fashion-book figure, artificial and apathetic: as the play proceeded, however, the lady developed unexpected resources, and the scenes of *Rachel's* conflict with her lover *Franklin* were rendered with genuine abandonment to the passion of the situation. Miss Pateman's energy and intensity received, as they well deserved, the heartiest applause. Mr. Neville is successful in the rather thankless part of *Franklin Blake*, whose monotonous occupation it is

to be incessantly displaying amazement at his own dishonesty. Mr. Swinbourne, an actor well practised in the poetic drama, brings an air of *Macduff* or some such hero to his portrayal of *Sergeant Cuff*, the detective officer; the actor's solemn sententious manner is impressive, however, and is not without a certain humour of its own. *Betteridge*, the old butler, is forcibly and elaborately represented by *Mr. Hill*, whose comicality will not be denied. *Miss Clack*, who in the play, it must be confessed, wearies far more than she amuses, is personated by Mrs. Seymour, an actress prone to exaggeration and indiscreetly anxious to be droll.

CX.

"THE HOUSE OF DARNLEY."

[Court Theatre.—October 1877.]

A CRITIC wrote concisely of the late Lord Lytton's play of "Not so Bad as we Seem," that it was "not so good as we expected." Perhaps a like judgment might fairly be passed upon the noble author's posthumous comedy, "The House of Darnley." It was inevitable, however, that Lord Lytton's fame should stimulate hope unduly. The author of "The Lady of Lyons" and of "Money" may reasonably be reckoned the most successful English dramatist of the nineteenth century. It may be said at once that with those established works the new comedy cannot afford comparison. But in estimating the worth of "The House of Darnley" it is very necessary to bear in mind the peculiar conditions under which it is submitted to the public. The play was left in an unfinished state; the whole of the last act has been furnished by Mr. Coghlan, who was without other clue than his fancy could suggest as to the original design of the dramatist. More than any other literary work, a drama must benefit by revision and reconsideration on the part of its author; in such wise weak points in construction may be strengthened, gaps in the story supplied, the dialogue braced, and the action



quickened. "The House of Darnley" has been denied these advantages, and without doubt suffers seriously from the lack of them.

At what period of his career Lord Lytton wrote his four acts we are uninformed. He may have freshly remembered Macready's vigour and passion and Helen Faucit's musical elocution when he first thought of placing upon the stage the dignified banker *Darnley* and his fond if fantastic wife, *Lady Juliet*. The work is true to the elder traditions of comedy. The characters own something of the theatrical stateliness of a past time; they speak sententiously; their phrases ring harmoniously, are endowed with oratorical regard for ornament. The dialogue is conducted in what used to be called "numerous prose," relieved at intervals by artificial banter and repartee of the kind dear to Pelham and Kenelm Chillingley; of the colloquialisms, the slang, and the "chaff" of our later drama, "The House of Darnley" exhibits few traces. Lord Lytton held that the speeches of the players, like their complexions, needed the assistance of cosmetics; that the stage should so mirror Nature as to show her at her shapeliest, and invest her proportions with heroic grace and symmetry. It is to be said, however, that the dramatist's characters do not forfeit substantiality or semblance to flesh and blood for all the exaltation of their demeanour. They interest and impress, as though realism had been strictly regarded in their composition, and they differed but little from the vapid creatures of everyday life. The ear soon becomes attuned to the changed key and the loftier concord of their discourse. In truth, the play does not suffer practically from its artificial character, pronounced though this be. A certain sense of pleasure results, indeed, from the spectacle of these dignified personages, with their measured

speeches, their florid sentiments, their polished airs, and formal manners.

But the story set forth by the play, while it contains several robust scenes, is of slight and infirm constitution. The *dramatis personæ* are required to connive too manifestly and mechanically at their own distresses. They open and shut their eyes, they speak or are silent, they understand or misunderstand each other, rather in compliance with the exigencies of the plot than with the dictates of reason. The jealousy and distrust that arise between *Darnley* and his wife are not of natural growth; they are the forced plants of a playwright's heated imagination. There is defective art in the treatment of the mysterious lady introduced in the first act and then apparently forgotten by the original author; she is seen no more until Mr. Coghlan is constrained to bring her again upon the scene for the sake of a superfluous explanation in the fifth act. Of course the audience dispel promptly the mystery concerning her, and decide upon her first appearance that she is the victim of the profligate *Sir Francis Marsden*, that she is the long-lost sister of the amiable philosopher *Mr. Mainwaring*, and that she has been generously assisted in her misfortunes by the rich and exemplary *Darnley*. But a benevolent gentleman who is so injudicious as to secrete a lady in a St. John's Wood villa, must be prepared to have his charitable motives misinterpreted, especially by his wife, when informed by accident of her husband's curious proceedings. The *Darnleys* of real life do not act in this way; but if the *Darnley* of the stage did not so conduct himself, the comedy would terminate at its second scene. Nor is it probable that *Darnley* would so long defer relating to *Mainwaring* the fact of the discovery of his sister, and

the pity and relief her sufferings demand. The effective scene in which the husband, by reciting a sort of apologue, warns his wife and her lover of their perilous position, seems borrowed from the "Gabrielle" of Emile Augier; while it must be in strange ignorance or defiance of the *Neighbour Constance* of Sheridan Knowles and the *Lady Gay Spanker* of Mr. Boucicault that Lord Lytton has intrusted his *Miss Placid* with yet another description of a fox-hunt. Among the other stale expedients of the play may be noted *Miss Placid's* efforts to escape marriage with *Mr. Fyshe*, by now affecting to be almost dumbly demure, and now assuming the airs and playing the pranks of a tomboy. Of Mr. Coghlan's last act the dialogue is perhaps the best part. Poetic justice is considered in the termination of the story, and yet it seems clear that the end is not brought about quite after Lord Lytton's manner. *Lady Juliet's* sale of her diamonds to avert the bankruptcy of her husband should rather have won back his tenderness than have provoked him to new wrath.

With all its defects, "The House of Darnley" secures the attention and the respect of the audience, and succeeds in right of its own good qualities, and not merely because of the esteem in which the performances of its departed author are generally held. If the theme be weak, it is yet strongly handled, and demonstrates sufficiently the wit and the humour and the literary accomplishments of the late Lord Lytton. The characters may not be new creations, but they are forcibly and effectively defined. The comedy has been provided for with the good taste and liberality which have so laudably distinguished Mr. Hare's management. The scenes representing the oak hall at *Lord Fitts-hollow's* and the drawing-room and library at *Mr. Darnley's* are admirable examples of the pictorial illusion of the

theatre. Mr. Hare plays with spirit the minor part of *Mainwaring*; Mr. Kelly personates *Darnley* with excellent force, feeling, and self-command. Mr. Titheradge, a new actor, is a creditable representative of the worthless *Sir Francis Marsden*; the calm timidity and the deliberate and calculating selfishness of *Mr. Fyshe* are perfectly portrayed by Mr. A. Bishop. The part of *Lady Juliet* perhaps overtaxes Miss Ellen Terry's physical resources; the actress is required to iterate her griefs and to maintain an attitude of anguish and despair during too protracted a period. The character, however, could hardly have been more picturesquely, gracefully, or pathetically represented. Miss Amy Roselle is most vivacious as *Miss Placid*; and Miss B. Henri's artistic rendering of the little part of the mysterious lady—the playbill does not reveal her Christian or surname—is well deserving of recognition.

## CXI.

## “DIPLOMACY.”

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—January 1878.]

M. SARDOU'S *comédie-drame* “Dora,” first represented with singular success at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in January last year, has been arranged for performance in English, and is now called “Diplomacy.” The five acts of the original have been reduced to four, and many changes have been effected, in regard less to the nature of the story, however, than to the nationality of its personages.

The play is a result of that frantic hatred of spies which has flourished in France since the war with Germany. The political sentiment which M. Sardou has converted to theatrical uses could hardly be translated, however. A young English lady charged with sending to Russia a plan of the fortifications of Constantinople is of inferior dramatic value to the young Frenchwoman accused of stealing important despatches and selling them to the Germans. The French feeling against Germany does not find its equivalent in the prejudice entertained by certain Englishmen against Russia. *Maurillac*, the young *diplomate* who marries the French *Dora*, appears in “Diplomacy” as an English officer, one *Captain Beauclerc*, who, in his capacity of military *attaché*, is intrusted with the conveyance

of political papers from Paris to Vienna; yet *Captain Beauclerc* is English only in name, or he retains, at any rate in his treatment of his wife and in his exhibitions of indignation and grief, much of *Maurilla's* French frenzy of manner. Certainly there is little of English nature in his wild despair, his strange speech, his moanings and sobbings, when he is constrained to credit his wife's guilt; nor is his conduct that of an English officer when he ventures upon the proposal, which *Dora* herself rejects, that he shall become an accomplice in her sins, and that they shall continue to live and love together as though her alleged acts of theft and treachery had never been. *Faverolle*, the light-hearted member of Parliament who acts as the good genius of the play, now becomes *Mr. Beauclerc*, the grave elder brother of *Captain Beauclerc*, and secretary of the Embassy at Paris; the *Baron Vander Kraft*, the German Fouché, who employs a Cytheræan cohort of spies, appears as *Baron Stein*; the young Austrian *Tékly* is renamed *Count Orloff*; and the *Princess Bariatine* finds representation of a sort in the person of *Lady Henry Fairfax*, supposed to be the wife of the English Minister at Constantinople. These changes have been accomplished dexterously enough; it may be doubted, however, whether they were really necessary, or whether they benefit appreciably the prospects of the play in England. As a rule, it is to be desired that an author's design should not be interfered with; while changes of name certainly fail to bring about conversions of nature or to induce the acceptance of French portraits as English likenesses. *Dora* and the *Beauclercs* are French people engaged in French adventures, enduring French sufferings, all the statements of the adapters to the contrary notwithstanding.

"Diplomacy" is a thoroughly effective drama, however,

and completely succeeded in representation, as it deserved to succeed, for its own sake, not less than because of the merits of the players. M. Sardou, in point of knowledge of the stage and skill in the construction of a plot, has no living superior. He is possessed of much inventiveness, and he depends considerably upon his recollection. He does not hesitate to lay preceding works under contribution when it seems to him that they can enrich his fables by a character or a situation, an effect or a scene. As a writer he may be surpassed by certain of his contemporaries; but if his dialogue sometimes lacks wit, it is rarely deficient in animation and appositeness. The defects of his plays arise often from the excess of his merits. He is apt to be super-subtle, and to oppress by the exuberance of his ingenuity. The spectator grows perplexed sometimes by the dramatist's endless encounters of wit and skill, the constant spectacle of wheel within wheel, of diamond cutting diamond, and of plot opposed by counter-plot. And now and then, in his regard for the mechanism of his task, M. Sardou loses sight of nature altogether. Improbability should be permitted the story-teller as an occasional privilege, but there is danger in reducing characters to the condition of mere puppets, moved not by reason, but jerked hither and thither in accordance with the caprice or the exigencies of their showman. The plot of "Diplomacy" has its weak places, and sometimes seems to hold together by defying verisimilitude altogether, and by the open connivance of the leading *dramatis personæ*. In the English version of the comedy the first and second acts are combined, and the *Countess Zicka's* confession is retrenched; she no longer avows her early sins as a thief, a beggar, and the wife of a forger, by way of preparing the spectators for her subsequent purloining of the despatch.

The strong *scène des trois hommes* occurs, therefore, in the second act of "Diplomacy." Here *Orloff* has to relate with exceeding reluctance his conviction that he owes his arrest by the Russian police to the perfidy of *Dora*, the bride of *Captain Beauclerc*. The interview which follows between the newly-married is far too prolonged, and scarcely sustains the interest which had been excited by the earlier scenes. The afflictions of the husband become wearisome by their repetition and demonstrativeness, and the devices of the dramatist seem to be here very near the surface. The last act pertains rather to *vaudeville* than to *drame*, or even to *comédie-drame*. Clearly the *Countess Zicka*, supposing her a living creature, would not have fallen into the trap laid for her; but it was indispensable that the play should end, and end happily; so M. Sardou forthwith takes pains to be comical, and forces his characters to assume attitudes upon which the curtain may comfortably descend.

Good plays make good players. The performance of "Diplomacy" left little to be desired, and was entirely free from that air of genteel torpor which sometimes oppresses the stage of the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Mr. Bancroft contents himself with the small part of *Orloff*, and relates the story of his arrest, and of his consequent distrust of *Dora*, with artistic forbearance and adroitness. Mrs. Bancroft strengthens the cast by the spirit with which she sustains the incredible character of the *Countess Zicka*. Mr. Clayton is impressive as the elder *Beauclerc*, and enhances the representation by his skill in byplay and facial expression; while nothing could be better in their way than the *Baron Stein* of Mr. Cecil, and the *Algie Fairfax* of Mr. Sugden. As *Captain Beauclerc* Mr. Kendal seems over-anxious to be impassioned, and declines some-



what into the conventions of French melodrama. The character of *Dora*, an *ingénu* with a capacity for pathetic and even tragic expression, hardly suits Mrs. Kendal's present means. The actress plays with grace and skill; but the artifices of her histrionic manner are too manifest, and her lack of youthful impulsiveness and genuine spontaneity is seriously felt. The scenes between *Dora* and her husband are assuredly clamorous enough, but deficient in the qualities which rouse the sympathies of an audience.

CXII.

"A FOOL AND HIS MONEY."

[Globe Theatre.—January 1878.]

MR. BYRON'S new comic drama has obviously been written for the sake of Mr. Toole. The dramatist has on many previous occasions taken the measure, so to speak, of the popular comedian,—never drawing the tape too tightly, but allowing him always room enough for his comicality to move freely in, and even to develop itself largely; and perhaps "A Fool and his Money" is hardly inferior to other works by the same hand contrived with a like object. Of course there can be little exercise of art in productions of the class; but a measure of ingenuity is needed in finding fresh opportunities for the actor, and in helping him to make the audience laugh as loudly and as continuously as possible. The bustle and the exaggerations of farce are permitted; the dialogue may be studded with jokes old and new, quips and cranks of all kinds; the story may be wildly improbable; and indeed the dramatist is fully licensed to do what he lists, provided only that he keeps his leading interpreter actively employed and constantly before the audience. Mr. Byron has again selected his hero from humble life, for somehow the lowly are understood to be always more ridiculous than the lofty, and exhibits once

more that familiar frolic of Fortune, which consists in suddenly enriching a poor man only with equal promptitude to reduce him again to his original condition. Like Mr. Thackeray's "James," Mr. Byron's *Charles* rises from domestic service to affluence; attempts to figure as a gentleman of property; and then resumes his former state, poetical justice kindly softening his fall by accommodating him with a public-house as a happy retreat for the rest of his days, and a pretty and tender housemaid for him to take to wife. This *Charles Liquorpond*, or *Charles*, as he calls himself, and is always called, is a very droll person, who deals with the English language much after Mrs. Malaprop's manner, but is chargeable with an infirm sense of morality. By exercise of what the law terms "undue influence," and by abuse of his position as butler and confidential servant in the household of an invalid old gentleman, he has obtained a will in his own favour and the disinheriting of the testator's rightful heir, one *Percival Ransome*. He purchases an estate in Wales, affects the airs of a country squire, and palters with his love for his old fellow-servant, *Mary Draper* the housemaid, in his ambition to marry *Miss Vandeleur*, the daughter of a showy but needy relation of his departed master. Another and less amusing portion of the story relates to the adventures of *Percival Ransome*, whose fallen fortunes compel him to accept the post of footman in the establishment of *Charles* the ex-butler. The fable is conducted in a very violent fashion, proceeds by leaps and bounds, and concludes with the abrupt dispossession of *Charles*. It is certainly strange that he should have known nothing of the suit in the Probate Court which was to set aside the will in his favour, and that he should so quietly accept his defeat at the hands of the lawful inheritor of the

property ; but probably the author never intended his plot to be the subject of serious consideration. Having shown Mr. Toole as one of the oddest of butlers, and as a caricature of a landowner in Wales, much perplexed by the language and customs of the country, and especially oppressed by the attentions of a native bard, equally devoted to poesy and liquor, Mr. Byron may have held that he had satisfactorily accomplished the task he had prescribed to himself. "A Fool and his Money" does not, perhaps, invite respect, but certainly it occasions much amusement. As *Chawles*, Mr. Toole entertains and gratifies his audience very thoroughly ; his eccentric butler, indeed, may be viewed as a valuable addition to his already extensive gallery of facetious portraits. The other characters are of minor importance. Mr. Herbert, however, is an adequate representative of *Percival Ransome* ; Mr. Righton is most vivacious as *Brabazon Vandeleur* ; and Miss Eliza Johnstone personates with admirable spirit the fond but vehement housemaid, *Mary Draper*.

## CXIII.

## "VICTIMS."

[Court Theatre.—January 1878.]

THE revival of Mr. Tom Taylor's comedy of "Victims," originally presented at the Haymarket in 1857, must surely be due less to the intrinsic merits of the work than to the prevailing dearth of new dramas. Comedies are not improved by keeping; and "Victims," although some attempt has been made to redecorate and modernise it, plainly exhibits signs of age, and even of decay. Certain of the characters—the two bores, *Curdle* the economist, and *Muddlemist* the metaphysician—have undergone complete suppression; the dialogue has been revised in the hope of investing its allusions with current significance; the name of Mr. Swinbourne is now mentioned where once Mr. Tennyson was referred to; and by way of adding the point of personality to rather blunt satire, *Miss Crane*, the strong-minded lady who advocates the rights of woman, is now called *Miss Pecker*. The play is professedly an original production; but this may perhaps merely import that it is not an absolute translation. Traces of a foreign foundation are here and there discernible, and seeing that Mr. Taylor has so long been famous rather as an adapter than as an inventor—often, indeed, borrowing by stealth,

as it were, and blushing afterwards to find it fame—it may reasonably be concluded that the theme of "Victims" enjoyed some sort of existence before it was pressed into the service of the British stage. The comedy pleased, however, at the Haymarket, supported by the strong company then directed by Mr. Buckstone; nor does it fail to amuse at the Court Theatre. But by the more subdued and refined system of interpretation now assigned to it, the coarseness of the play's artifices and the rude unreality of its characters stand fully betrayed. Twenty years ago an element of boisterous farce was indispensable to comedy at the Haymarket, while of acting generally it may be said that it was then required to be rather theatrically effective than punctiliously lifelike. Mr. Hare's strict regard for truth and nature, and his affection for a *mise en scène* of fantastically picturesque quality, seem out of harmony with dramas of rough humour and broad caricature. The dignity of comedy perhaps paired off long since with the dignity of history; still in plays affecting to portray modern life, manners, and character, a certain reserve seems desirable in regard to the means employed to stir mirth. The crowning incident of "Victims" relates to the accidental delivery to a strong-minded woman in the course of an evening party of a pair of trousers in lieu of the satin dress or the India shawl she had been led to expect. The situation is unquestionably comical; but it must be said that the laughter that ensues is obtained by sacrificing probability and artistic propriety. Earlier portions of the play deal with the enthusiasm of a stockbroker's wife, who much undervalues her husband, on behalf of a young poet who neglects his wife—the undervalued husband and the neglected wife constituting the real "victims" of the story. The interest arising from the collision, so to speak, of these

four personages, is not very strong, and completely fades away at the end of the second act. The stockbroker is hardly a typical stockbroker, for he is gifted with a simplicity so consummate that it verges on imbecility; while the poet is represented as a thoroughly contemptible creature. Of course the lady's eyes are at last opened to the genuine worth of her husband and the worthlessness of her lover for all his poetic gifts, while the neglected wife is consoled as the curtain prepares to fall by a promise of fuller domestic happiness in the future and the amendment of her culpable partner. These materials were not very fresh in 1857; they seem now certainly vapid and commonplace. What may be called the usual seasoning of comic servants, speaking in Cockney tones and mispronouncing after a Cockney fashion, has been supplied with a liberal hand; and other subordinate characters, including one *Butterby*, the comic lover of the strong-minded woman, who is responsible for the mistake of sending her the trousers, enrich the list of *dramatis personæ*, and contribute more or less to the entertainment of the audience.

As a work of art or of literature, "Victims" might easily be overrated; it is only fair to recognise, however, its merits as an acting drama. Mr. Taylor is skilled in the playwright's craft, is usually careful not to miss his mark by aiming too high, and takes especial pains to secure the suffrages of the gallery. The performance did not flag, and was frequently greeted with applause. Mr. Kelly's gifts as an actor of dignity and impressiveness are somewhat wasted upon such a flimsy character as *Mr. Merryweather* the stockbroker, originally played by Mr. Howe; while Mr. Hare seems uncomfortably placed as the young poet *Herbert Fitzherbert*. Miss Ellen Terry as *Mrs. Merry-*

*weather* thoroughly enters into the spirit of the character, and portrays with ease and grace the lady of æsthetic tastes, enjoying delicate health, poetic aspirations, and exceeding sensibility. In strong contrast appears Mrs. G. Murray as *Miss Pecker*, robust of aspect and masculine of dress, with manners and bearing suggestive of the lecture-hall and the woman's rights platform. This character was admirably impersonated. To give due effect to Mr. Buckstone's old part of *Butterby*, the services of Mr. J. Clarke have been expressly engaged. The popular comedian was very warmly received, and contributed valuably to the success of the representation. Other characters were well sustained by Miss B. Henri, Mr. Bishop, and Mr. Cooper.



## CXIV.

## "LOUIS XI."

[Lyceum Theatre.—March 1878.]

CASIMIR DELAVIGNE is chiefly known in England by his tragedy of "Louis XI.," although other of his dramas, instance "Don Juan d'Autriche" and "Marino Faliero," have been pressed into the service of our stage. As in "Marino Faliero" he borrowed from Lord Byron, so in "Louis XI." he depended upon Sir Walter Scott, whose "Quentin Durward" was at one time a very popular book in France. The tragedy was first produced at the Théâtre Français in 1832, when the leading character was "created," or incarnated, by Ligier, an actor of fame in his day, for whose behoof Alexandre Dumas the elder was at one time planning an adaptation of Shakspeare's "Macbeth."

Although "Louis XI." deals with history pure and simple, with scarce a grain of fictitious or invented matter, it is not a historical play of the Shakspearean pattern. It presents no series of pictures of an eventful past, demanding—

"A muse of fire,  
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene."

It does not crowd the stage with illustrious personages, "in little room confining mighty men." It respects the prescriptions of French classical tragedy, the unities of time and place; the scene does not move from Plessis-les-Tours, and seven years are skipped over, so that the death of Louis may follow hard upon the death of Charles the Bold, an anachronism being held preferable to the sacrifice of a unity. Nor has the dramatist contented himself with these restraints and disabilities. His play possesses no heroine, no plot, and no characters to speak of, save only *Louis* himself. To invest him with importance, a general system of suppression and demolition has been ruthlessly enforced, and the King has been portrayed in the most glaring colours, laid on not without art assuredly, but yet so fiercely and coarsely that the confines of caricature are oftentimes something more than approached. The Louis of Scott's novel is not altogether an unsympathetic character; but M. Delavigne's *Louis* is a monster who is all faults. The French dramatist does not recognise, with Victor Hugo, or with one greater than he, that "there is some soul of goodness in things evil." *Triboulet's* physical defects are forgotten in his devotion to his daughter; the moral deformity of *Lucrezia* is purified by her love for her son; but the *Louis* of the tragedy knows no redeeming point, is odious and despicable in all respects; is scarcely human, indeed, in his lack of every natural feeling and worthier impulse. The murderer of his father and brother, he is jealous and suspicious of his own son; he is at once a bold criminal and an abject coward; cool and crafty, he yet permits himself frenzies of rage; a bloodthirsty tyrant, he is a slave to the most degrading superstitions, consummately hypocritical, and yet grossly bigoted. It is certainly curious that a French writer of M. Delavigne's rank should thus

present one of the most eminent, sagacious, and successful of the rulers of France. But although M. Delavigne may have failed as a historian, he has surely succeeded, not as a dramatist exactly, but as an adroit tactician of the theatre. He has brought upon the stage a very impressive figure—his *Louis* takes rank with the *Gloucester* of Cibber, let us say, rather than of Shakspeare, in the opportunity it affords actors of pretence to illustrate character by means of strong incisive strokes, to deal in facial expression and passionate display, to be both humorous and tragical, and from first to last to arrest and dominate the emotions of the audience in a very extraordinary degree. The play is often feeble, and always monotonous; but Louis remains one of those commanding parts, the force and the attractions of which are deeply felt both by the players and their public.

Charles Kean's *Louis XI.* was modelled upon the impersonation of Ligier, and was thought by many to have surpassed its original. It was the actor's most successful achievement, and was remarkable for its intensity and concentrated power, for its absolute self-command not less than for its moments of sudden abandonment to the vehemence and passion of the situation. In this part the actor's physical peculiarities, his eccentricities of look and tone, gait and gesture, were, if not forgotten, so merged in his performance, as to lend it valuable support and distinction. Mr. Kean first represented the character at the Princess's Theatre in 1855, in a version of the tragedy prepared by Mr. Boucicault, who contented himself with compressing the text, converting its mellifluous rhymes into blank verse, which, if it here and there soared towards bombast, as often declined into colloquy, and in so softening the catastrophe as to spare the life of *Nemours*: a change of very little value. It is in Mr. Boucicault's

arrangement of the play that Mr. Irving is now appearing at the Lyceum Theatre.

Mr. Irving's success in "Richard III." almost ensured his triumph in the part of *Louis XI.*—an inferior *Gloucester*, mean and cowardly, sick and weak, credulous and fanatic, grovelling at the feet of priests and physicians. The actor presents a most conscientious, artistic, and elaborate study of the character. He is more senile, perhaps, than have been other representatives of *Louis*, who was but sixty when he died; the quavering note of age and decrepitude is heard even in his strongest and boldest utterances; the hand of death seems to oppress him even from his first entrance. But Mr. Irving is true to his own conception of his part, and allowing for a trifling excess of accent now and then when it is deemed expedient to insist upon some special point, his performance is throughout very masterly, even and consistent, subtle and finished. There is no neglect of the small delicate touches which give completeness to a picture, while the stronger portions of the design are executed with supreme breadth and boldness. Mr. Irving boasts the great actor's art or gift of at once riveting the attention of his audience; presently his influence extends more and more, until each word and glance and action of this strange king he represents—so grotesque of aspect, so cat-like of movement, so ape-like of gesture, so venomous in his spite, so demoniac in his rage, and meanwhile so vile and paltry and cringing a poltroon—are watched and followed with a nervous absorption that has something about it of fascination or even of terror. The performance reaches its climax perhaps in the king's paroxysms of fear after *Nemour's* assault upon him; the actor's passionate rendering of this scene, his panic-stricken cries and moans, prayers, and threats, and the spectacle of

physical prostration that ensues, affecting the audience very powerfully. The death of the king is elaborately treated, but with no undue straining after the horrible; for the protraction of the scene the dramatist must be held chiefly accountable. Here, the slipping of the sceptre through the flaccid nerveless fingers of *Louis*, the moment after he has announced himself "strong and capable," may be noted as an original and ingenious artifice on the part of the actor. In his assumption of the chief characters of the more heroic or poetic drama, Mr. Irving may now and then have failed to satisfy critical demands; it is certain, however, that in these distinct and individual impersonations he is seen to signal advantage, and can afford comparison with the best artists of his class. There is probably no actor now living who can present such an interpretation of *Louis XI.* as Mr. Irving offers nightly at the Lyceum Theatre. The tragedy has been handsomely equipped for representation; the scenery and costumes are tasteful and appropriate, occasionally reviving memories of Doré's illustrations to the "Contes Drolatiques" of Balzac. The subordinate characters are not very forcibly performed; but M. Delavigne has left them vague and colourless. It is difficult to distinguish *Oliver* the barber from *Tristan* the hangman, or *Commune* the historian from *Coitier* the physician. The character of *Nemours*, however, affords some opportunities for pathetic expression; of these Mr. Tyars does not take advantage.

CXV.

"OLIVIA."

[Court Theatre.—April 1878.]

"OLIVIA" is Mr. Wills's most satisfactory contribution to the stage. Avowedly founded "upon a leading incident in the 'Vicar of Wakefield'"—it would be perhaps more correct to say "leading incidents"—the drama is faithful rather to the sentiment than to the humour of Goldsmith's immortal story, and presents the characters of the original under their most serious aspect. On this account the earlier scenes, lacking dramatic action, move somewhat heavily, and the spectator has to be content with the picturesque qualities of the entertainment: the playwright, as it were, subordinating himself to the scene-painter, the costumier, and the stage-manager. Upon the stage idyls are apt to wear a very artificial air, and "Olivia" is at first so sedulously simple, so elaborately pastoral both in theme and treatment, the personages occupying the scene are so uncommonly moral and righteous, that a certain feeling of oppression is engendered, and the audience seem indeed for a time to be breathing the over-heated atmosphere of a Sunday-school. It is almost with a sense of relief, after the village children have sung a hymn and departed, that discovery is made of the presence of

wickedness upon the scene in the person of young *Squire Thornhill*, for now at any rate virtue is supplied with a contrast, and what is even of more importance, distinct promise is made of dramatic interest. And this promise Mr. Wills, happily, is able to fulfil. Discarding the misadventures of Moses at the fair, and the pranks of Lady Blarney and Miss Skeggs, and withholding all mention of Mr. Ephraim Jenkinson and his transgressions, the dramatist confines himself to the elopement of *Olivia*, the perfidy of the *Squire*, and the sufferings in such wise inflicted upon *Dr. Primrose* and his family. Only occasional use is made of the dialogue of the novel; but the play is throughout tastefully and carefully written, often with a felicitous imitation of the literary manner of the last century, while the lapses into the colloquial forms of to-day are not numerous. And it may be noted that Mr. Wills gains his chief successes in the scenes which are rather of his own devising than directly supplied by the original. The pathos of *Olivia's* departure from home has been thoroughly appreciated and expressed by the dramatist, while the later scene of the *Squire's* confession of his villany is treated with genuine power, and yet with a forbearance that is at this point the best proof of skill in dramatic composition. In the last act Mr. Wills's adroitness is less marked. The converse of the *Vicar* and *Olivia* wants truth and relevancy, and the strains of sorrow, so to speak, are disturbed too suddenly and noisily by notes of comic music. It is too late in the play for attempts to portray the *Vicar's* humours as a preacher or a controversialist, while *Olivia's* mood at the moment of her return to the home she had disgraced would scarcely incline towards merriment. In the case of *Mr. Burchell* and *Sophia*, the course of true love runs

too smoothly to be very interesting, and on the stage the lovers are found to be too prosaic, staid, and sensible to move much sympathy. More gratification is afforded by a suggestion of the possible mating in the future of *Moses*, the *Vicar's* son, with *Polly*, the little daughter of *Farmer Flamborough*. Mr. Wills has been fortunate, not merely in his performers, but also in his manager. Mr. Hare demonstrates anew that he has elevated theatrical decoration to the rank of a fine art; indeed, his painstaking and outlay in placing the play upon the stage justify suspicion that it was produced almost as much for its pictorial as for its dramatic merits. In either case, advantage has been taken of the opportunity to present a special reflection of the artistic aspects of the last century with regard to furniture and costumes, china and glass, &c. A sort of devout care has been expended upon the veriest minutiae of upholstery and ironmongery; a fond ingenuity is apparent in every direction of the scene; and the foibles and fancies of those who love, or imagine that they love, cuckoo-clocks, brass fenders, carved oak, blue-and-white crockery, and such matters, have been very liberally considered and catered for. Prettier pictures have not, indeed, been seen upon the stage than are afforded by the Primrose family, their friends and neighbours, goods and chattels, and general surroundings, in this play of "Olivia." But a higher claim to distinction arises from the method of its representation. In the hands of Miss Ellen Terry *Olivia* becomes a character of rare dramatic value, more nearly allied, perhaps, to the *Clarissa* of Richardson than to the heroine of Goldsmith. The actress's singular command of pathetic expression obtains further manifestation. The scene of *Olivia's* farewell to her family, all unconscious of the impending blow her flight is to inflict upon them,



is curiously affecting in its subtle and subdued tenderness ; while her indignation and remorse upon discovering the perfidy of *Thornhill* are rendered with a vehemence of emotion and tragic passion such as the modern theatre has seldom exhibited. Only an artist of distinct genius could have ventured upon the impulsive abrupt movements by means of which she thrusts from her the villain who has betrayed her, and denotes the intensity of her scorn of him, the completeness of her change from loving to loathing. Miss Terry is not less successful in the quieter passages of the drama, while her graces of aspect and manner enable her to appear as *Olivia* even to the full satisfaction of those most prepossessed concerning the personal charms of that heroine,—so beloved of painters and illustrators,—to whom have been dedicated so many acres of canvas, so many square feet of boxwood. As *Dr. Primrose* Mr. Hermann Vezin displays the intellectual force, the sense of character, the refinement of feeling, which have made him famous as an actor ; it is solely due to the dramatist that the Vicar is deprived of the shrewd humour which was his distinguishing property when he left the hands of Dr. Goldsmith. In the character of *Squire Thornhill* Mr. Terriss wins, as he deserves, considerable applause ; the actor, who is new to the Court Theatre, exhibits intelligence, self-control, and ease of manner under circumstances of a trying kind. To make such a confession as *Thornhill's*, and yet to save the character from becoming wholly repulsive, involved a task of some difficulty. Mr. Terriss proved himself equal to the occasion, and a notable addition to Mr. Hare's company.

CXVI.

"ELFINELLA."

[Princess's Theatre.—June 1878.

"ELFINELLA," the new play by Ross Neil—whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss, the programme reveals not—is a graceful and poetic work, but deficient in dramatic purport and interest. Fairy plays of necessity appeal rather to the fancy than to the feelings; they deal with subjects that stand apart from general experience; they disconcert sympathy in their avoidance of the "deeds and language such as men do use," the human follies and the crimes constituting the legitimate themes of tragedy and comedy. The story of "Elfinella" may be said to be descended from Fouqué's "Undine," a typical production, in which the supernatural is employed with curious art, and a sense of poetic mystery is impressively conveyed. But such fables acquire in the theatre a force and crudeness of outline, a solidity of substance, that are of disenchanting effect; it is hardly for the players indeed to venture upon rivalry with the poet in giving shape to things unknown and a local habitation and a name to airy nothings. Hazlitt has pointed out the disagreements existing between poetry and the stage, and the failure of all attempts to reconcile them. "The ideal has no place upon the stage. . . . That which is merely an

airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. . . . Fancy cannot be represented any more than a simile can be painted." Fairies may always people the realms of the imagination; but they forthwith forfeit their magic when materialised into conventional ballet-girls, in customary suits of muslin and fleshings, with rouged cheeks and whitened arms, paste-board wings and sandal shoon of satin.

"Elfinella" is in four acts; the story is set forth after rather a wire-drawn fashion; certain of the scenes proceed languidly, and provoke considerable weariness. The heroine is supposed to be hesitating between mortality and immortality. In her infancy, *Elfinella* had been stolen and adopted by the fairies. Arrived at womanhood, she is permitted to return for a while to a state of mortal existence. In the world, if she finds much to loathe, she discovers something to love; and finally she elects to abandon fairy-land absolutely, and to remain among her human kindred, sharing their pleasures and their pains, and with them marrying and giving in marriage, growing old and dying in due course. The relief of humour is provided by the characters of *Hans*, a henpecked peasant, and his shrewish but affectionate wife, *Lisa*, the sister of *Elfinella*. *Waldmar*, the nephew of *Hans*, becomes the lover of the heroine. The scene is laid in Switzerland, and, with a preciseness unusual in fairy tales, the autumn of 1315 is fixed upon as the date of the occurrences of the drama. But the struggles of the Swiss against Austrian invasion and oppression lend historic circumstance to the natural and supernatural adventures of *Elfinella*. The play is written in adroit blank-verse, and abounds in passages of poetic quality; the literary value of the work, indeed, is not for a moment to be gainsaid. In this respect "Elfinella" takes prece-

dence of all recent productions upon the stage. The author has yet to acquire, however, the discretion of a practised playwright in regard both to choice and manipulation of subject. "*Elfinella*" suffers from its length and its monotony; the want of movement and action is seriously felt; the scenes follow and resemble each other too closely; there is excess of dwelling upon one idea, of harping upon one string; certain of the speeches and conversations are severe taxes upon patience and powers of endurance.

From the performers the play scarcely received justice; but the difficulties attendant upon its representation were certainly great. At the present period of her career, Miss Heath is not well advised to essay such characters as *Elfinella*. The actress brings to the impersonation much cultivated but unconcealed art, a studied picturesqueness of mien, and an elaborate series of postures and gestures, sinuous swimming movements, woven paces, and waving hands; but regard for nature is omitted from her histrionic method; and with Mrs. Skewton we may ask for "less conventionality and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial!" Mr. Rignold is perhaps needlessly boisterous as *Hans*, but there is some comedy in his performance; Miss Drummond plays *Lisa* with excellent spirit. Mr. C. Warner is competent to represent such a character as *Waldmar* the lover; but the actor indulges in explosions of emphasis and a breathless ecstasy of manner which tend towards extravagance. Generally it may be said that the performers would benefit by the study of elocution and the art of reciting blank-verse. "*Elfinella*" has been liberally furnished with musical and scenic accessories and embellishments.

## CXVII.

## "VANDERDECKEN."

[Lyceum Theatre.—June 1878.]

MR. FITZBALL'S old Adelphi melodrama, "The Flying Dutchman," begot in due season "Der Fliegende Hollander;" and now Herr Wagner's opera has engendered "Vanderdecken," a new poetic drama in four acts, written by Messrs. Fitzgerald and Wills. These dramatists profess to have based their play upon the old legend of the Flying Dutchman. It should be recognised, however, that they stand much indebted to modern dealings with the subject, and notably to Herr Wagner's libretto. The story of the wicked sea-captain who, in the face of a gale of wind, swore that he would double the Cape of Good Hope though he beat about until doomsday, may be traced back to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. It is to Heine we owe the fine invention, which Herr Wagner quickly pressed into the service of his score, of releasing the accursed Dutchman from his fate by means of the love of a woman "faithful unto death," willing to sacrifice her life to save his soul. There was no suggestion of this in the Adelphi play: a thing of horror and blue fire, produced in rivalry of the fables of "Frankenstein" and "Der Freischutz." Fitzball's Vanderdecken was a grim spectre,

the thrall of the Evil Principle, and bound at intervals to find a wife among mortals by way of increasing the number of his victims. Certainly the drama did not end with the salvation of its hero. Some attempt to relieve the doom of the Dutchman was made by Captain Marryat, when he founded a novel upon the fable, and resorted to the religious magic of a certain sacred amulet or relic to bring Vanderdecken's wanderings to a comfortable end. It was in Fitzball's play, however, as staunch Wagnerians are willing to admit, that the famous composer discovered the prosaic germs of his grand poetic and musical ideas.

The Dutchman of Messrs. Fitzgerald and Wills is in the main the Dutchman of Heine and Wagner: a Salathiel of the sea, cursed with eternal life, permitted to quit his flying ship with the blood-red sails but once in every seven years in quest of a bride who shall prove herself a paragon of affection and fidelity. He meets with hospitality at the hands of a Norwegian—a Scotchman, according to Heine—whose daughter, from long brooding over his story and his portrait, which by a strange chance hangs in her chamber, is predisposed to surrender herself to the mysterious stranger. Although affianced to another—he is called *Eric*, a forester, in the opera; he appears as *Olof*, a sailor in the Lyceum play—she does not hesitate to abandon her betrothed and her home, and ultimately to yield up her life, so that her weird suitor, the Flying Dutchman, may be saved. While faithful to this ground-plan, however, the English playwrights have much elaborated the superstructure. Their drama, indeed, suffers from the redundancy of their exertions and the sophisticated air they have given to a subject which gained force from its simplicity. The early scenes are effective enough. The first act is a kind of prologue;

*Vanderdecken* does not appear, but the legend of his curse is told both in prose and verse, while by means of a magic-lantern a vision of the phantom ship is exhibited in the background. The entrance of *Vanderdecken* in the second act is impressively contrived, and his interviews with *Nils*, the Norwegian pilot, and his daughter *Thekla*, if of undue length and unskillfully interrupted by a shifting of the scenes, yet sustain the mystery and poetic gravity of the story. It must be said, however, that the drama weakens as it proceeds, and is much overburdened with words. Mr. Fitzball was not a cultivated writer, but he was skilled in the production of stage effects; he was careful not to cheapen his *Vanderdecken* by allowing him to appear too often or to say too much. But the Lyceum *Vanderdecken* rarely quits the stage, and talks interminably. The supernatural attributes with which he at first seemed clothed fall from him one by one; his solemn speeches weary by their monotony and protraction; he becomes too familiar a figure upon the scene, and sinks finally into a very commonplace and mortal creature indeed, bandying vulgar abuse with *Olof*, *Thekla's* ill-used lover, and even fighting with him a broadsword and dagger combat of a thoroughly conventional pattern. After this condescension on the part of the immortal Dutchman, it is not so very surprising to find him worsted in the encounter, and even thrown into the sea for dead. He revives, of course, so that the play may end, as the opera ends, with the self-sacrifice of the Norwegian maiden; but Messrs. Fitzgerald and Wills bring about their catastrophe after a tame and tedious fashion, injudiciously defer the fall of the curtain, and nearly wreck their play upon the rocks of an anti-climax.

"*Vanderdecken*" is unequally written; now the *dramatis*

*personæ* are content with the flattest prose, and now they express themselves in blank verse of rather tumid character. A desire to be poetic and declamatory at all costs affects injuriously the later scenes, and renders the play often gravely oppressive. *Vanderdecken's* descriptions of the countries he has seen, his experiences in tropic and arctic regions, assume the form of high-flown lectures, such as might accompany a moving panorama at the Polytechnic Institution; and *Thekla's* love seems less voluntarily bestowed than borne away from her by an impetuous torrent of words. To the last it is doubtful how far *Vanderdecken's* suit is to be regarded as sincere; for of course his escape from his fearful doom is of more moment to him than the love or the life of *Thekla*. The sombre play was received with some applause, but it was plain that the audience were not wholly satisfied. As *Vanderdecken* Mr. Irving exerts himself to the utmost; his performance is remarkable for its picturesque intensity, its power of self-control, and passionate oratory: the part, however, is not, in truth, worthy of so fine an actor.



## CXVIII.

## "THE WINTER'S TALE."

[Drury Lane Theatre.—October 1878.]

MR. CHATTERTON has re-opened Drury Lane Theatre with a performance of "The Winter's Tale," hoping, perhaps, he may find reason to reverse his former decision to the effect that "Shakspeare spelt ruin." Mr. Charles Kean's arrangement of the text has been followed, and some attempt has been made to imitate the scenic splendours and illusions of the grand revival of the play at the Princess's in 1856. The allegorical exhibition of the Flight of Time, with *Luna* in her car and *Phæbus* in his chariot, has not been attempted; but a grand Pyrrhic dance is introduced in the first act, and an uproarious Dionysiac festival occurs in the fourth. The trial of *Hermione* takes place in the theatre at Syracuse, and Bithynia is throughout substituted for Bohemia, pursuant to the suggestion of Sir Thomas Hanmer in 1744, and the example set by Garrick in 1756. The bear that should eat *Antigonus* does not appear at Drury Lane, however; at the Princess's, it may be remembered, this animal figured conspicuously, chasing the *Antigonus* of the time—the late John Cooper—with peculiar zest: Mr. Charles Kean carefully justifying the existence of bears in Asia Minor by a quotation from the second chapter of the

Second Book of Kings ! But certainly the representation at Drury Lane, if it may not altogether compare with Mr. Kean's revival—the result of profuse expenditure, exceeding painstaking, and an almost crazy fondness for archæological accuracy—is as complete in regard to stage decorations and musical embellishments as a general audience could possibly desire. Several new scenes have been painted, the costumes are very brilliant, and the dancers and supernumeraries crowd the stage. So far, indeed, "The Winter's Tale" has not before been so liberally equipped by any Drury Lane manager, even when account has been taken of the production of the play by Macready in 1842, and by Mr. James Anderson in 1850. The present performance, however, is gravely deficient in histrionic aptitude and intellectuality ; the more poetic passages of the drama fail to impress as they should, and would in the hands of competent interpreters. It becomes plain, indeed, that the possibilities of representing Shakspeare upon the stage weaken and fade as the players grow less and less accustomed to appearance in imaginative works, and the portrayal of the more heroic emotions. The Drury Lane company is of some strength, includes performers of very respectable ability ; yet the representation often flagged, lost force and spirit ; the actors found their task so strange, or were without confidence in themselves, their efforts, or their audience. There were some exceptions : Mrs. Vezin's *Paulina* was entirely admirable, genuinely vehement and intense, the text being delivered with the voluble promptness of one who knows her Shakspeare well, and is skilled and fertile in histrionic illustration of the poet ; there were touches of true art also in the *Old Shepherd* of Mr. Cowper and the *Clown* of Mr. Calhaem ; while elocutionary accomplishment was to be found in the *Polixenes* of Mr.

Edgar and the *Antigonus* of Mr. Ryder, who, by the by, was Mr. Kean's *Polixenes* in 1856. Mr. Dillon's *Leontes* is but a conventional performance, however; vigorous and energetic in its way, yet void of incisiveness and of that sympathetic quality and nervous excitability by means of which subtler tragedians have made the groundless jealousy of *King Leontes* seem credible and even rational, moving their audiences sharply and deeply. Miss Fowler is weak and uninteresting as *Perdita*. Mr. Atkins is a hard, dull, and ungenial *Autolycus*—what a jovial rogue was the *Autolycus* of Harley!—while Miss Wallis as *Hermione* is most unsatisfactory. Possessed of certain qualifications for theatrical success, the lady wearies by her redundant artifices of gesture and attitude, by her stilted manner, and the drawling pompousness of her elocution; regard for simplicity and nature seems wholly banished from her method of representation; in her hands *Hermione* loses all matronly grace and dignity, assuming instead the semblance of a tight-laced hysterical schoolgirl. As *Florizel* Mr. Edward Compton makes a first appearance of some promise; possibly, however, the actor's *forte* may be found to lie in other than the Shakspearean drama. "The Winter's Tale" was received with the boisterous enthusiasm usually forthcoming on the opening night of Drury Lane Theatre, and probably the revival will interest many who are curious concerning the representation of Shakspeare upon the stage. The play has not undergone performance in London for more than twenty years; such another period may elapse before "The Winter's Tale" again finds its way back to the theatre.

CXIX.

"THE CRISIS."

[Haymarket Theatre.—December 1878.]

IN his comedy of "Les Fourchambault" M. Augier has dealt with the vice of calumny, a popular theme upon the French stage ever since Don Bazile's famous discourse in the "Barbier de Seville;" and, further, following the example set by M. Alexandre Dumas in his "Fils Naturel," has exhibited, the better to condemn, the sins of certain fathers against their unlawful children. M. Augier is nothing if not didactic; he is witty and eloquent; the stage is to him something of a pulpit, and he finds in Paris attentive and admiring audiences of his moral essays by reason of the striking illustrations that accompany them. In the interest of virtue he portrays vice, and the public applauds because it likes the picture. He is of those authors who delight in what is called "laying bare the sores of social life," and he gathers round him an eager crowd, careless about his ideas of healing and reform, but discovering unhealthy delight in the shocking spectacle he sets before them. "Les Fourchambault" was received with extraordinary favour in April last upon its first production at the Théâtre Français; the success of the play being due to its own merits, dramatic and literary, with

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allowance, of course, for the excellence of the actors concerned in its representation. In these times of translation and adaptation, it was clear that sooner or later an attempt would be made to present "*Les Fourchambault*" upon the English stage. Mr. Albery has boldly taken the matter in hand, and produced "*The Crisis*."

It may be said at once that "*The Crisis*" is by no means a comfortable or an agreeable sort of play. Mr. Albery has been guilty of the sin by which adapters have usually fallen: he has altered too much, not merely with reference to the susceptibilities of the original author or the integrity of his work—things of trivial import to adapters on all occasions—but in regard to the drama's prospects of success. In compliance with the silly superstition that English audiences will only interest themselves about English persons, he has laboured to denationalise the work: he has simply denaturalised it. The scene is transferred to London and the characters bear English names; the "*Fourchambaults*" are now the "*Denhams*," and so on. But if it can be said that M. Augier's creations have in this wise ceased to be French, they certainly have not become English. In the first act, the best of Mr. Albery's version, all goes well enough. The story is opened with genuine dramatic art, and a sufficient measure of interest is generated. Nothing happens that might not reasonably be supposed to happen in an English household of the rich middle class. A tone of comedy is fairly preserved; the dialogue is bright and lively, with only intermittent declinings towards the drollery of farce. But in the second act we are in another world; we have crossed the threshold of melodrama, and scent Kotzebue in the air. The sorrowing mother enters, all tears and black lace, pallid cheeks and grey curls, sensibility and false sentiment.

She is constrained to make confession to her robust middle-aged son, effusively affectionate, of the sins and sufferings of forty years ago. He is illegitimate ; she had married, but informally ; his father, influenced by calumnies concerning her, had refused to validate his union with her ; had indeed wholly abandoned her and her infant to the mercy of the world. Nevertheless, this base-born son, ignorant of his mother's shame, has prospered in business, has realised a handsome fortune, lives with her affluently in a house well provided with black and gold, blue and white modern-antique adornments. But now there is a panic or crisis in the City: The putative father is on the verge of bankruptcy. The feelings of his victim towards him, however, are still of the tenderest description, the long years of cruel neglect she has undergone notwithstanding. She persuades her son, who has little will of his own, to advance an enormous sum to save the credit of the father he has never seen, and concerning whose welfare he can scarcely be expected to care very much. Respectable City men of the present day do not usually give away vast amounts after this easy fashion ; but in the present instance the son's sacrifice seems less due to an overstrained sense of duty than to a weak desire to gratify a fond but excessively emotional mother. This scene did not secure the complete sympathy of the audience, but did not seriously offend them—it may be doubted whether they quite clearly apprehended its significance ; but later passages in the comedy relating to M. Augier's other victim of calumny—an exemplary young lady, who in the midst of a family circle is bluntly accused of leading a vicious life—provoked the angry expostulations of the house. Mr. Albery had rather aggravated the unpleasant nature of the original incident, and certainly it needed very delicate handling. In the last

act the illegitimate and the legitimate son are seen in conflict, the one striking the other a severe blow in the face; the audience indeed have reason to be thankful that they are spared a like scene between father and son. It may be argued, of course, that the stage is not limited merely to the mirroring of grateful matters; but there is a question of art involved in the attempt to discuss before a mixed audience certain topics of morality and decency. So far as the play aims at gratifying by shocking, it may be said to succeed, with an understanding that there are many tedious scenes both in the French and English versions: the strained motives influencing the characters, and the artificial distresses afflicting them, are often very trying to patience. M. Augier's dialogue has been interlarded with jokes of Mr. Albery's own contriving; these are sometimes amusing enough, if a little strained and far-fetched in their facetiousness. The more serious speeches are apt to be wordy and pompous, their unreality contrasting forcibly with the prosaic quality of the general dialogue.

In Mrs. John Wood's hands, *Mrs. Denham*, otherwise *Madame Fourchambault*, becomes a most energetic and entertaining person, quaint of speech as of mien; gravity indeed is out of the question when she is present upon the scene, for the lady seems somehow to have escaped from a farce of the broadest pattern. This is not due simply to the actress's natural vivacity and exceeding sense of humour: Mr. Albery has charged her with the delivery of lines expressly designed to tickle the gallery. Miss Eastlake needs more sobriety of demeanour, but she represents with much grace and intelligence the maligned *Miss Burnside*. Mr. Kelly is portentously solemn as the illegitimate son; Miss Moodie plays pathetically the diffi-

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cult part of his tearful mother. Mr. Fisher, junior, is seen to some advantage as *Lord William Whitehead*, whom the bill describes as a Radical, the play making no disclosure of his political opinions. Other characters are creditably personated by Mr. Howe and Miss Buckstone, and by Mr. Terriss, who is unduly inclined, however, to melodramatic exaggerations of tone and gesture.



## CXX.

## "HAMLET."

[Lyceum Theatre.—January 1879.]

MR. IRVING'S managerial career has commenced most auspiciously. The opening representation was, indeed, from first to last simply triumphant. A distinguished audience filled to overflowing the redecorated Lyceum Theatre, and the new *impresario* was received with unbounded enthusiasm. These gratifying evidences of goodwill were scarcely required, however, to convince Mr. Irving that his enterprise carried with it very general sympathy. His proved devotion to his art, his determination to uphold the national drama to his utmost, have secured for him the suffrages of all classes of society. And it is recognised that he has become a manager, not to enhance his position as an actor—for already he stands in the front rank of his profession—but the better to promote the interests of the whole stage, and to serve more fully, to gratify more absolutely, the public, his patrons. Let it be added as a minor matter, that he has followed the good examples set by Mr. Hollingshead and Mrs. Bancroft, and has been careful of the comfort of the audience, neither permitting them to be pinched for room, nor subjecting them to those petty imposts which, like so many turn-

pike dues, have so persistently impeded the visitor on his passage from the street to his seat within the theatre.

The tragedy of "Hamlet" was well chosen for the first performance under the new management: as *Hamlet* Mr. Irving has obtained his greatest success. It has been said that no actor has ever been known to fail as *Hamlet*; it may be added that no actor has ever as *Hamlet* completely satisfied critical opinion. To many the play is a metaphysical study wholly unsuited for theatrical exhibition: "an enigmatic work," as Schlegel says, "resembling those irrational equations in which a fraction of unknown magnitude always remains that will in no way admit of solution." To many *Hamlet* is a mysterious and complex character, beyond the power of histrionic art adequately to interpret. Mr. Irving can at any rate point to the fact that, four years ago, for two hundred nights in succession he played *Hamlet* to delighted crowds at the Lyceum. Weighed against popular success so consummate and prodigious, objections of whatever kind are but as feathers in the scale; and even those least disposed to accept this latest stage-portraiture of *Hamlet* can afford to admit that the picture is in itself consistent and harmonious, the work of an ingenious and intellectual artist. Mr. Irving's *Hamlet* is very much now what it was in 1874; the colouring somewhat sobered perhaps, with here and there further elaboration of detail. There have been more princely *Hamlets* and more passionate; for it is not given to Mr. Irving to be graceful, and his physical means limit his expression of fury or frenzy; his voice lacks sonority, is usually, indeed, rather flat in tone, and he has to practise what Lamb called "politic savings and fetches of the breath, husbandry of the lungs," to induce his light tenor organ to perform baritone duties. For this reason he is

more effective in colloquy than in soliloquy; his longer passages are without the music of sustained elocution, and to secure variety of tone he seems compelled to resort to incoherences of speech, and rapid changes of key, as it were, high falsetto alternating with notes of bass quality. His *Hamlet* is less intolerant of *Polonius* than formerly, if still exceedingly splenetic with *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern*; proceeding even to brutal violence in the scene of his destroying the inoffensive recorder borrowed from the musicians simply to illustrate his censure of his friends—the student *Hamlet* would surely have treated more tenderly the little instrument of art. In modern regard, however, *Hamlet* is not the amiable character he was once deemed. Schlegel dissented from Goethe's too favourable judgment of him; and a later critic has laboured to show that *Hamlet* was wholly unworthy of admiration or sympathy, that he “basely and persistently shirked his duty, and made mean subterfuges to excuse himself.” But with these opinions theatrical audiences have not much concerned themselves. The *Hamlet* of the stage retains his popularity in right of the opportunities for display he affords his impersonator; and perhaps also in right of his youth and picturesqueness, his inky cloak and black silk stockings. In like manner, according to Macaulay, Charles I. obtained a larger share of compassion than was strictly his due because of “his Vandyke dress, his handsome face, and his peaked beard.”

Mr. Irving always interests and succeeds in impressing, for he is an original actor; he has invented a histrionic method of his own, and he brings to his every performance, not merely stage adroitness of a special sort, but much refined intelligence. The restlessness of expression and gesture which seems natural to him, or not perfectly con-

trollable, is of real service in representing *Hamlet's* exacerbated nervous condition, which the visitation of his father's spirit inflames and intensifies almost to madness; for in Mr. Irving's *Hamlet* it is to be noted that a simulated insanity keeps pace with, and yet is distinct from a mental excitement near akin to absolute disease of brain. At the suggestion, possibly, of the late G. H. Lewes, certain passages usually suppressed of *Hamlet's* semi-jocose converse with the *Ghost* "in the cellarage" at the close of the first act have been restored to the stage. The gain is not very apparent, however, and curtailment being absolutely necessary, this portion of the play could better have been spared than some others: for instance, *Hamlet's* interview with *Claudius* in the fourth act. The total exclusion of *Hamlet* from the fourth act is, indeed, a grave defect in the acting version of the play adopted at the Lyceum. Mr. Irving's best successes are obtained in his difficult scenes with *Ophelia*, and, presently, with the *Queen*. Here with subtle art he suggests the presence of an extreme tenderness beneath the veil of all his bitterness and vehemence. With the *Players* he is familiar almost to flippancy, while permitting himself to be unduly indignant at the harmless foppery of *Osric*. His modes of pronunciation and elocution Mr. Irving cannot now, perhaps, be expected to amend; genius makes laws for itself, and its aberrations must be tolerated; otherwise it might be worth while to inquire, among other matters, why Mr. Irving's *Hamlet*, meditating the murder of *Claudius* at his prayers, waves about a lighted torch within a few feet of him, as though expressly to rouse him to a sense of his peril, as a danger-signal warns a coming train of a possible accident? Or why, in his duel with *Laertes*, *Hamlet* is cumbered with a

bonnet and Mephistophelian plumes of a caricature kind? Or why, bidding good-night to his mother, *Hamlet* so involves himself with the chamber candlesticks? It may be thought, perhaps, that the scene thus becomes more real; but these details tend to vulgarise poetic tragedy, which should occupy ground removed from the trivialities and the homeliness of ordinary life. Moreover, such small effects and artifices of stage management may oftentimes deserve censure fully as much as the interpolations of the clowns, and for the same reason, that they divert attention from its proper object, and are apt to set on barren spectators to laugh when some necessary question of the play has to be considered. While *Hamlet* is so busy with torch or candle, Shakspeare is forgotten in the thought that misadventure of an incendiary sort may possibly occur upon the stage with serious consequences.

From Miss Ellen Terry Mr. Irving receives invaluable support. An *Ophelia* so tender, so graceful, so picturesque, and so pathetic has not been seen in the theatre since Macready's *Hamlet* many years ago found his *Ophelia* in the person of Miss Priscilla Horton. In characters of this class, the heroines of genuine poetry, Miss Terry is now without a rival, is indeed unapproached by any other actress upon our stage. Her personal graces and endowments, her elocutionary skill, her musical speech, and, above all, her singular power of depicting intensity of feeling, are most happily combined, as the audience were quick to discover and applaud in this very exquisite presentment of *Ophelia*. In other regards the performance is creditable to Mr. Irving's company, albeit Mr. Forrester seems not well suited as *Claudius*, and Mr. Swinbourne is scarcely comfortable as *Horatio*; perhaps

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the actors might change places with a more satisfactory result. Mr. Cooper is an energetic *Laertes*; Mr. Kyrle Bellew a vivacious *Osric*; and the ungrateful characters of *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern* find unusually efficient representatives.

## CXXI.

## "THE LADY OF LYONS."

[Lyceum Theatre.—April 1879.]

"THE LADY OF LYONS" is now more than forty years old, and has undergone a good deal of wear and tear; it has been sharply criticised, even rudely ridiculed, and the players have done their best and their worst with it; still the work retains its place upon the stage, and almost all its old power to amuse and interest an audience. It is now represented "with a difference," however. Mr. Bulwer—the author was then untitled—wrote for a large theatre, and for performers aiming at an exalted and heroic histrionic method, priding themselves upon their declamatory powers, their displays of emotion and passion, with due regard for the customs and conventions of the stage. They imitated Nature, not with the minute literalness of workers in terra-cotta, but after the bold, broad, and sublimating manner of a sculptor engaged upon a marble statue. At the Lyceum a general effort seems to have been made to bring "The Lady of Lyons" more into the domain of reality and common life, to tame its fervour and clip its poetic wings. The play has not hitherto been presented with so subdued an air; the performers for the most part appear to have subjected themselves to

a severe process of self-repression. An artistic spirit has ruled the stage arrangements and decorations; the author has been credited with a desire, of which he was perhaps wholly innocent, to depict accurately the aspect of social life in France under the Directory. The costumes and furniture of that period have accordingly been reproduced with singular accuracy, but with an admirable regard, nevertheless, for the tasteful and the picturesque. More adroit and attractive scenic illusions than are presented by the drawing-room and gardens of *M. Deschappelles's* house at Lyons have not occupied the stage. Mr. Irving has properly restored the first scene, which Mr. Fechter, careful rather of the stage interests of *Claude Melnotte* than of the character of *Pauline Deschappelles*, ventured to excise. Mr. Irving has been less judicious, however, in suppressing the performance of the "Marseillaise," which has usually enhanced the animation of the scene concluding the fourth act.

To the part of *Claude Melnotte* Mr. Irving brings great painstaking and special energy, but the performance may not be counted among his successes. The lack of youthfulness of manner is injuriously felt, and the long poetic passages fail in their effect from the actor's unmusical delivery; too often he seemed to be preaching, and not preaching well. It may be that Mr. Irving is too much habituated to portray the more saturnine sentiments and emotions for satisfactory rendering of *Claude Melnotte's* love, folly, and sin. Of excitement of tone, gesture, and mien there was no deficiency; indeed, the actor's anxiety to be emphatic sometimes betrayed him into extravagance. In this way his *Claude* seemed a greater and baser delinquent than he has usually been represented; and his criminality certainly gained in intensity by contrast with the singular



delicacy and refinement of Miss Ellen Terry's *Pauline*, who really points the moral of the play when she demands—

“What was the slight of a poor powerless girl  
To the deep wrong of this most vile revenge?”

But there have been *Paulines* not fairly describable as poor or powerless, but almost vixenish in their attributes, repaying their lover's perjury with infinite scorn, and uttering very fierce tirades in reply to his rather long-winded explanations. With curious art Miss Terry passes over the artificial quality of *Pauline's* harangues, and lays stress on her more amiable characteristics—shows that her pride is rather matter of education than of nature—that she is in truth tender, gentle, trusting, loving, and altogether womanly. To some, no doubt, the part will seem underplayed, particularly with reference to the intentions of the author and the traditions of representation. Miss Terry's performance, however, takes high rank among contemporary efforts, in right of its poetic sensibility, its girlish grace, its simplicity, its subtlety, its exquisite elocution, and that surprising picturesqueness of aspect, pose, and movement which seem to be the peculiar and exclusive possession of the actress. The costumes of the Directory period Miss Terry invests with an artistic elegance which scarcely belongs to them as a matter of right. Mr. Walter Lacy quits his well-earned retirement to appear as *General Damas*, and presents in sober colours a finished portrait of that popular officer. The veteran actor was received by his audience with the heartiest applause. The other characters are efficiently supported by Mr. Forrester and Mr. Bellew, Mrs. Chippendale and Miss Pauncefort. The representation moved the audience to a great exhibition of enthusiasm.

CXXII.

"THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM."

[Imperial Theatre.—October 1879.]

SOME time since Mr. Boucicault, avowing his faith in the sufficiency of the living drama, protested against the reproduction of departed plays. "I no more desire," he wrote, "to see the defunct dramatist occupying the stage than I wish to see my grandfather rise out of his respected tomb and reclaim my inheritance." But of course Mr. Boucicault's sentiments upon this subject are peculiar to himself. It is not every one who is in a position to regard the public stage exactly as his own private property. For my part, I perceive no reason why an old play should not be now and then taken down from the shelf, dusted and aired, with a view to its fitness for representation being fairly considered. And it becomes almost necessary to have recourse to defunct dramatists when living playwrights so steadily diminish or exhibit such decidedly inferior capacity. There are occasions when dead lions may really be preferred to living dogs, notwithstanding the proverb to the contrary. I looked therefore with some interest to the promised revival of "The Beaux' Stratagem" at the Imperial, better known as the Aquarium Theatre. I cannot

say, however, that the representation afforded me unmeasured gratification.

Comedies are but a perishable class of goods: like wines, they may be kept too long, to the loss of sparkle, flavour, body, and colour. They picture manners and times which vary and vanish; they retain at last only an antiquarian sort of interest. In Queen Anne's reign and long afterwards, Farquhar's play enjoyed great popularity; its wit and humour were thoroughly appreciated, and what was of more importance, the spectators recognised in its characters spirited portraits of the men and women of the period. Such gallants as *Aimwell* and *Archer* could be seen any day in Covent Garden; *Mrs. Sullen* and *Dorinda* were constantly visible on the Mall or in the Ring; *Sullen* and *Scrub*, *Gibbet* and *Boniface*, were thoroughly commonplace persons, living within the radius of everybody's experience. Of course all attractiveness of this sort has now gone from the comedy; to modern playgoers the characters in "The Beaux' Stratagem" are almost as antediluvian animals, strange, extinct, monstrous. Nor do our modern players possess the power of revivifying these types of the past. Traditions of manner are not counted as of much value in the theatre of to-day; yet the successful performance of such plays as this of Farquhar's almost depends upon the preservation of tradition. I suppose that something of the manner of Wilks, the original *Archer*, survived in Garrick's performance of the part, and was afterwards handed down to Charles Kemble. Clearly it should be the business of the players to reproduce as closely as possible the characters as Farquhar conceived them, and to reflect in some measure the high animal spirits reputed to distinguish that dramatist above his contemporaries. I must say that I found certain of the performers at the

Imperial Theatre very low-spirited indeed. The dreariness of Mr. Edgar's *Aimwell* was kept in countenance, however, by the depressing quality of Miss Meyrick's *Dorinda*.

The text has been revised, the old coarseness expunged, and there is nothing now to offend in the play, unless it be the "gags" and additional jokes which have been interpolated by an unknown authority: Farquhar's humour should have sufficed. The representation dragged somewhat, and I suspect was found wearisome by many; the truth being perhaps that the story is stated after rather a rambling and incoherent fashion, and that much time and space seem devoted to the episodic characters of the landlord, the highwayman, and the Irish-French priest *Foigard*, who are now all without the pale of sympathy, and scarcely intelligible to modern spectators. Queen Anne-ism being so much in vogue, I thought perhaps the revival had been decided upon as a means of illustrating that foible upon the stage; but I was mistaken. There has been liberal expenditure in equipping the play for performance; accuracy of detail, however, has not been much studied, either by scene-painter or costumier. The interior of Boniface's inn is very picturesquely treated; but the gallery in *Lady Bountiful's* house, with a picture by Greuze over the mantelpiece, has a very unlikely look. The costumes for the most part pertain to the time of George III. The most successful impersonation of the night was Mrs. Stirling's *Lady Bountiful*—strictly natural, while extremely comical. Mr. Farren's *Archer* lacks the graces of youth, perhaps, but is abundantly animated. Mr. Lionel Brough succeeds as *Scrub*, in spite of an over-anxiety to be droll. As *Mrs. Sullen* Miss Litton is very charming of aspect; but the actress, I think, lacks force and breadth of manner

for the due presentment of this character, which was first sustained by Mrs. Oldfield. Miss Litton succeeds better as a *soubrette* than as a *grande coquette*. *Cherry* was prettily played by Miss Carlotta Addison; Mr. Ryder was equal to the part of *Sullen*. Revivals of "The Beaux' Stratagem" will probably be few and far between; those who are curious concerning the work may therefore be advised to go and see it represented at the Imperial Theatre. As the auctioneers say, "Such an opportunity is not likely to occur again."

CXXIII.

"DUTY."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—October 1879.]

POPE held Farquhar's dialogue to be "pert and low." What would Pope have thought of certain of the jokes, puns, and puerilities which Mr. Albery has plentifully sprinkled over "Duty:" his adaptation of "Les Bourgeois de Pont-Arcy"? Mr. Albery, however, must not be judged merely by his defects; he has written some excellent dialogue—brisk, bright, and witty—and has obviously spared no pains to render "Duty" acceptable to the audiences of Tottenham Street. But what a play, viewed as a reflection of English life, manners, and character! For the *venue* of M. Sardou's story has been changed according to the adapter's custom; the *dramatis personæ* are called by English names, and are supposed to take part in events happening upon English soil. When "Les Bourgeois de Pont-Arcy" was first produced in Paris, a French wit proposed that the play should be named either "Les Précautions inutiles et les Craintes sans Objet," or "Les Raffinements d'une Délicatesse exagérée." These ridiculous titles point to the fundamental weakness of M. Sardou's story; it is as a house built upon the sands, or with the dry-rot in its timbers. The incidents depend for their existence upon an imaginary difficulty, an

artificial distress. Of a husband's falsities and failings comic use has often been made ; M. Sardou would turn these to tragical account. A country gentleman, dying, leaves behind him, not merely a lawful widow and her son, but also his mistress, a betrayed woman with an illegitimate child. The discovery of this fact might reasonably be supposed to sadden or even to shock the respectable relatives of the late lamented, but certainly would not justify the convulsional and frenetic proceedings in which M. Sardou's characters indulge. But the widow is one of those saintly insipid mothers of whom French dramatists are so fond ; she is a hothouse flower, and the winds of heaven must not visit her face too roughly : the truth must never be told her lest it should wound her delicate ears ; a mature woman, she must always be treated like a child in a nursery. Such a fragile invertebrate creature is recognised as credible in France ; but as I know her, the British matron, the female Bull, as the late Nathaniel Hawthorne politely called her, is made of sterner stuff. Yet Mr. Albery ascribes to an English woman the imbecilities of M. Sardou's French mother. The son conceives it to be his simple and strict duty to take upon himself his father's sins, and thus to prevent all shock to his mother's feelings ; he therefore avows himself the seducer of his father's victim, and the father of his father's child ! As a result, he is compelled to resign the love of his affianced bride ; he becomes an object of reproach and scandal to the cathedral-town society in which he moves, and he has to endure the bitter upbraidings of his absurd mother. The situation becomes indeed an outrage upon the dignities and the decencies of English domestic life, when the mother is found imploring and even commanding her son to take to wife his father's mistress, and assume to be the parent of his illegitimate half-brother !

Of course the lady has to learn the truth at last, as she might have learnt it at first ; for the proper person to inform her, her brother, a sensible and kind-hearted gentleman enough, has been present by her side throughout the play. Humorous characters of a familiar pattern are introduced to give the relief of comedy, and even of farce, to these scenes of tragedy ; but altogether M. Sardou's drama, as interpreted by Mr. Albery, strikes me as the most disagreeable stage-production of recent times. There is even a failure of M. Sardou's customary ingenuity in the conduct of the story. When the interview between the son and the mistress is suddenly interrupted, it is impossible to believe that each would leave exposed bank-notes and compromising letters as evidence of their compact ; and the situation that ensues is a sacrifice of all probability to the necessities of plot.

The players seemed oppressed by the insincerity of their occupation, and scarcely able to emerge from conventionality. Mrs. Vezin's personation of the mother was much applauded ; but the actress's pathos is apt to sink into peevishness, and I confess I find something wearisome about the rather whining cadences of her elocution. Mr. Cecil was admirable as the brother ; and Mr. Conway, having conquered the nervousness which at first beset him, displayed genuine art in his representation of the super-sentimental son, who cruelly abandons his bride to spare his mother a pang. Miss Marion Terry, who appeared as the *ingénue*, I thought very graceful and charming in almost the only natural scene in the play, her reconciliation with her lover. Mrs. John Wood, charged with a very highly coloured part, played it in a highly coloured fashion. For breadth of humour and pungency of expression Mrs. Wood has no rival upon the stage ; I always find her acting most entertaining ; and yet I fear her presence in "Duty" was as



a discordant note, or as the enlivenment of a dirge by means of a comic song. I congratulate Miss Dietz upon her skillful performance of the trying part of *Marcelle Aubry*, the *modiste* who has to relate the story of her own fall from the paths of virtue. Other parts in the play are very well played by Mr. Kemble, Mr. Forbes Robertson, and Mr. David Fisher, junior.

CXXIV.

"THE IRON CHEST."

[Lyceum Theatre.—October 1879.]

"THE IRON CHEST" of George Colman the Younger is an old-fashioned play, but it contains certain effective scenes, and offers good opportunities to an actor of tragedy. I need not recount how, from the combined effects of asthma, opium, ill-temper, and obstinacy, John Kemble failed in the leading character upon the first performance of the play in 1796, and how very furious George Colman waxed upon the occasion. All that is now ancient history; it has since been demonstrated over and over again that in competent hands *Sir Edward Mortimer* is an interesting and impressive character, and that audiences are apt to be much stirred by the events and situations in which he figures. I do not think Macready ever assumed the part; at any rate, I find him, in his Diary, denouncing the play, expressing himself "disgusted with the patches of sentiment and claptraps upon national privileges, humanity, and all the other virtues in which George Colman was so rich—on paper." Otherwise *Sir Edward Mortimer* has been personated by all our players of eminence in turn. I remember seeing "The Iron Chest" some five-and-twenty years ago, the hero being represented by Mr. Charles Kean, who probably followed

if at some distance and with unequal steps, his father's method of performing the part. The playgoers of that time were more tolerant, I think, than are our audiences of to-day of obvious stage-tricks and effects in the way of starts and whispers, stamping and strutting, fretting and fuming, spouting, and what I must even call spluttering. They accepted these artifices and expedients as among the proper conditions of histrionic performance; and notwithstanding, or it may even be because of, these things, they allowed themselves to be greatly excited. As I recollect, "The Iron Chest" was received with enthusiasm, and the efforts of Mr. Charles Kean rewarded with the heartiest applause. The play is chiefly defective in regard to its incoherence; the incidents are all detached or semi-detached. Colman seems to have been in doubt as to whether he would the most depend for success upon the music of Storace, the drolleries of Dodd and Suett, or the tragic airs of Kemble. The scenes devoted to *Sir Edward Mortimer* and his story have the remotest connection with the scenes occupied by the *Rawbold* family; while between that depressing household and the band of robbers who receive the boy *Wilford* so hospitably the relationship is very hard to discover. The consistency of the drama is only preserved by viewing *Wilford* as the common friend or acquaintance of *Sir Edward*, the *Rawbolds*, and the robbers respectively. Of course Goodwin's novel of "Caleb Williams" lies at the foundation of "The Iron Chest" and the infirmities of Colman's play result from his attempts to deal dramatically with an undramatic subject. The attractions of the novel were found in its graduality of development and the incessant movement of the scenes in which Caleb is hunted from place to place by Falkland; and these are just the qualities which cannot be adequately reflected upon the

stage. Nowadays "Caleb Williams" is more admired than read; critics have long contented themselves with handing down an unexamined tradition of its surpassing merits—De Quincey being excepted, however; for he did not hesitate to laugh the book to scorn. I confess that when I last looked into "Caleb Williams," I thought it dull and disappointing, after allowance had been made for the originality and the striking nature of its theme. It is written in a rude, crude style, and abounds in absurdly stilted descriptions of scenery, unnatural characters, and most artificial pictures of society. However, we are much less concerned now with "Caleb Williams" than with "The Iron Chest." Hazlitt pronounced Colman's serious writing in the play to be "natural and flowing," and "in some measure an imitation of Shakspeare." The description seems to me certainly too flattering. But Colman's speeches are often eloquent enough, if they incline to verbosity; they are the conventional efforts of a skilled playwright contriving occasions for declamation. Sincerity, perhaps, is lacking throughout the play, with genuine poetic force, depth, and feeling. But the blank verse may be fairly said to be as good or as bad as the late Lord Lytton's.

Altogether Mr. Irving was quite justified, I think, in producing this play at the Lyceum Theatre. Preceding tragedians had bestowed a reputation upon it; and no doubt it occurred to him that, in his turn, he could do something with the character of *Mortimer*. He had, indeed, served a sort of apprenticeship to the part by his achievements as *Mathias*, as *Eugene Aram*, and as *Philip* in Mr. Aidé's play. He is an adept in depicting remorse; while, unlike that fabled artist who could only portray red lions—they might be larger or they might be smaller, but they must be red lions—he has demonstrated also his power of

illustrating wide and varying ranges of passion and character. It seems to me that his *Mortimer* may rank quite among his best performances, in right of its artistic completeness, its picturesqueness, its intensity, and its moderation. In none of his characters has he exhibited more thorough control of himself and of his art, keeping voice and gesture well in subjection, repressing habits or tricks of manner, and yet retaining in full his wonted power to impress, to awe, and to excite. Bringing the costumes of the play nearer to modern times—this has not been accomplished, however, without some tampering with Colman's text ; a small matter, perhaps—he has also modernised the method of impersonation ; so that *Sir Edward Mortimer*, becoming more like a gentleman of the eighteenth century than he has appeared on former occasions, pertains more to nature and reality, less to fiction and the stage, than has been his wont hitherto. Some of the old traditional points and effects, swift transitions and grand explosions, may have been missing ; but I do not know that they were much missed. Mr. Irving's *Sir Edward Mortimer* commands attention and interest from his first discovery upon the scene, the impression strengthening and deepening as the play proceeds ; the actor's early forbearance and repose enhancing by the force of contrast his absolute self-abandonment when the climax of the story is reached, and the situation permits, and even demands, a display of a most vehement and frantic sort. Mr. Irving found adequate support in the *Lady Helen* of Miss Florence Terry, the *Fitzharding* of Mr. Barnes, and the *Adam Winterton* of Mr. Carter, performances which were all agreeable and intelligent if they attained no higher level ; while elements of old-established low comedy were discoverable in the *Samson Rawbold* of Mr. Johnson. Perhaps *Wilford* should

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have been supported by an actor of more experience than Mr. Forbes can at present boast ; he took evident pains with the part, but his manner is awkward and monotonous, and he is curiously epicene of aspect ; I think, too, the skirts of his coat might advantageously be lengthened. I have no doubt, however, that Mr. Forbes will improve when his profession has become less strange to him than it seems to be at present.

## CXXV.

## "RESCUED."

[Adelphi Theatre.—October 1879.]

GODWIN, describing the origin and birth of his "Caleb Williams," stated that for some two or three weeks he was employed in jotting down hints for the work before he was engaged seriously in its composition; that in this way he began with his third volume, then proceeded to the second, and finally grappled with the first. I conceive that Mr. Boucicault must adopt a similar plan when he concocts his "new and original sensational domestic dramas"—such as "Rescued," for instance. He probably devises an exciting incident for his third act, and then occupies himself with dovetailing to it earlier and later scenes; the success of the drama depending upon the strength of its exciting incident. In the third act of "Rescued" a toy railway train rattles over a toy viaduct; the villain of the story is supposed to have endangered the safety of the train in order that death may result to a child, the rightful heir to vast estates, who is understood to be travelling in one of the carriages. In my eyes the scene had rather the effect of a puppet-show or of a clockwork exhibition; it was purely mechanical, a matter of wires and pasteboard, paint and canvas; I could find in it no human or dramatic

interest. And even those who permitted themselves to be thrilled by this sort of nursery spectacle must have felt that it was scarcely led up to or followed with the author's usual ingenuity. I know that Mr. Boucicault only plans by such works as this to please the meaner capacities; but he is so careful not to aim over the heads of his audience, that sometimes, I think, he aims too low, and merely hits the ground. "Rescued" will not take its place beside "After Dark" and the "Streets of London." The story is feeble and confused, overburdened too with episodic matter: a commonplace romance of the established *London Journal* pattern. The characters are merely old dolls with new names: the reduced nobleman, the persistent detective, the honest working man, the shrewd lawyer, the hardened villain, the virtuous heroine, so proud, that she would rather do her own washing than accept a pension from the Crown—these reappear, saying and doing very much what they have said and done in many previous plays. The Adelphi audience, however, seem rather to have outgrown such productions as "Rescued;" and they accorded an unflattering reception to the new drama, interrupting it occasionally by their expressions of dissatisfaction. An unusually strong company has been engaged to appear in "Rescued;" but with weak characters even strong companies avail not. Indeed, the presence of so many admired players upon the stage had rather the effect of dividing and distributing the interest of the story, which, being of a meagre quality, needed husbanding and focussing as much as possible. The freshest portion of the play dealt with the fortune of *Biddy*, a blind woman, and *Midge*, her daughter, who personates, during her leisure hours, her own long-lost twin-brother; but the main object of the play is not served by these means. I waited patiently for



the wit and humour which usually illumine Mr. Boucicault's writings; there was a faint sparkle now and then in the dialogue, but it did not endure; it soon departed, it may be to look after the inventiveness and dramatic tact also characteristic of the author, but also absent from his present play. Of the performers I need only say that, quite with their usual ability, Mr. Vezin represented the villain, a welcher, pretending to be a Russian count; Mr. Henry Neville, an energetic working man; Mr. J. G. Taylor, a comic pointsman; Mr. Pateman, a lawyer; and Mr. Fernandez, an Irish detective. Miss Pateman personated the aristocratic heroine who does her own washing, *Lady Sybil Ferrers*; Miss Foote, the heroine of humble life, who pretends to be a boy and eventually marries the comic pointsman.

CXXVI.

"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE."

[Lyceum Theatre.—November 1879.]

AN actor who has appeared with applause as *Hamlet* and *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Richard*, must feel almost constrained to essay the character of *Shylock*. In times past, of course, *Shylock* was handed over to the low comedians to do their worst with; and Shakspeare's words, more or less, were delivered by the old-fashioned Jew of the streets, three-hatted, carrying an old-clothesman's bag, and afflicted with the guttural accents of Houndsditch. This absurdity was expelled the stage by Macklin in the first instance, whose example was followed, after intervals, by Cooke and Kean; so that *Shylock* now comes before us essentially a tragic character. It had seemed to me, from the time of Mr. Irving's first experiments with the Shakspearean repertory, that, in the part of *Shylock*, he would find peculiar opportunities for the employment of his art; his power as an actor greatly consisting in the portrayal of definite character and special individuality as opposed to the more abstract and ideal creations. His best successes, to my thinking, have arisen from his presentment of strong personalities in which the prosaic element has prevailed over the poetic. His *Richard* I have always accounted his most complete

achievement, and I am now much disposed to rank his *Shylock* with his *Richard*. No doubt *Shylock*, as a stage figure, has long worn the impress of Edmund Kean's genius ; but there is a sort of natural Statute of Limitations in regard to histrionic traditions and prescriptions ; and the lapse of nearly half a century has a good deal blunted, so to say, Kean's points, and rendered nugatory the old conventions of performance. Mr. Irving's *Shylock*, I may say at once, is not the *Shylock* of the patent theatres ; nor must the violence of tone, the fierceness of gesture, the explosions of passion, so long associated with the part, be looked for at the Lyceum. I have known *Shylocks* who have seemed from first to last in a frenzy of malignancy, whose every speech had a certain detonating quality, and with whom ranting and raving were as close and continuous habits of life ; and I must own that very cordial applause was wont to wait upon those excesses of representation. It is not only that Mr. Irving has not sufficient physical force for such clamorous exhibitions, but his conception and treatment of the character are altogether more subdued. He plays in a minor key, as it were ; sufferance appears genuinely the badge of his tribe ; long oppression and the custom of submission have tamed and cowed him until intolerable wrong blows the grey ashes of his wrath red-hot again ; he is veritably "old *Shylock*," as he describes himself and as the *Doge* addresses him : the years weigh upon him, he is infirm of gait, his face manifests the furrows of care and the pallors of sickness ; and if he has stinted *Launcelot Gobbo*, his servant, in the matter of food, he has not been more liberal to himself. Mr. Irving is always picturesque. His *Shylock* is carefully arrayed, if without the traditional red cap which Venetian law compelled the Jews to wear, and by no means fails in artistic qualities of

expression, line, and colour. The performance is altogether consistent and harmonious, and displays anew that power of self-control which has come to Mr. Irving this season as a fresh possession. Every temptation to extravagance or eccentricity of action was resolutely resisted, and with the happiest results. I never saw a *Shylock* that obtained more commiseration from the audience; for usually, I think, *Shylock* is so robustly vindictive and energetically defiant, as to compel the spectators to withhold from him their sympathies. But Mr. Irving's *Shylock*, old, haggard, halting, sordid, represents the dignity and intellect of the play; beside him, the Christians, for all their graces of aspect and gallantry of apparel, seem but poor creatures. His hatred of them finds justification in his race and his religion, and in the fact that they, his mental inferiors, are his tyrants; and when he is plundered by them alike of his child and his gold, his detestation turns naturally not so much to blind fury as to a deadly purpose of revenge. There is something grandly pathetic in the fixed calm of the Jew as he stands in the judgment-hall, a figure of Fate inexorably persistent, demanding the penalty of his bond; he is no mere usurer punishing a bankrupt debtor; if he avenges private injuries, he also represents a nation seeking atonement for centuries of wrong. By what a technical quibble is he denied justice, and tricked out of both penalty and principal! What a pitiful cur is *Gratiano* to yelp at his heels! One's sympathies follow the baffled and persecuted Jew as he slowly withdraws from the court; it is impossible to feel much interest in the release from peril of that very dull personage *Antonio*.

This was Mr. Irving's best scene, as it is of course the climax of the play. In the earlier passages he seemed bent, I thought, upon varying his tones too frequently, dropping

into a colloquial manner too suddenly ; while his interview with *Tubal* suffered somewhat from an accidental failure of memory on the part of his playfellow. But the representation was upon the whole singularly complete ; the success of Mr. Irving's new venture was, indeed, never questionable for a moment. I regret, however, that his acting edition of the play has not dispensed with much scene-shifting which now oppresses and delays the performance ; in this respect the arrangements of Mr. Charles Kean in 1858 and of Mr. Bancroft in 1875 were more to be admired. For modifications of this kind to suit the conditions of modern performance are, I hold, quite permissible. Shakspeare changed his scenes so often because there were, in fact, no scenes to change ; much stage-management was then effected by the imagination of the spectators, whose thoughts "pieced out" the imperfections of the performance. "The Merchant of Venice" is one of the least compact of Shakspeare's works ; *Shylock*, the most prominent character, disappears at the end of the fourth act ; and the two plots—the caskets and the "merry bond"—are very slightly connected : *Shylock* and *Portia* only meeting in the trial scene. Mr. Bancroft, I remember, contrived very happily to pack the Belmont scenes closely together ; and Mr. Kean's second act required no change of scene—the "exterior of *Shylock's* house" sufficed throughout. Mr. Irving, retaining the *Prince of Morocco*, has dismissed the *Prince of Arragon* from the cast : both these suitors, however, appeared alike at the Princess's and at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Happily the *Portia* of 1875—who rendered memorable a revival that was otherwise rather ill-starred, for all the taste and refinement of its scenic decorations—Miss Ellen Terry, lends her invaluable assistance to Mr. Irving at the Lyceum ; and a more admirable *Portia* there could scarcely be. Nervous at first, and

weighed down possibly by the difficulty of equalling herself and of renewing her former triumph, the lady played uncertainly, and at times with some insufficiency of force ; but as the drama proceeded her courage increased and her genius asserted itself. Radiantly beautiful in her Venetian robes of gold-coloured brocaded satin, with the look of a picture by Giorgione, her emotional acting in the casket-scene with *Bassanio* ; her spirited resolve, confided to *Nerissa*, to prove "the prettier fellow of the two ;" her exquisite management of the most melodious of voices in the trial before the *Doge* ; the high comedy of the last act—these left nothing to be desired, and obtained, as they deserved, the most enthusiastic applause. *Antonio* and *Gratiano* were but weakly interpreted ; Mr. Johnson proved an acceptable *Launcelot*, versed in the humours of the part ; and there was decided merit in the stalwart mien and natural feeling of Mr. Barnes's *Bassanio*. Miss Alma Murray appeared as *Jessica*, and Miss Florence Terry as *Nerissa*, both actresses finding favour with the audience. The new scenes by Mr. Hawes Craven and others are excellently artistic, and the costumes and furniture very handsome and appropriate.

## CXXVII.

## "KING HENRY V."

[Drury Lane Theatre.—November 1879.]

SHAKSPEARE'S "King Henry V.," considered as a stage-play, is an unsatisfactory work; so much, I think, may safely be said even with deference to that literary fashion, comparatively modern as to its origin, which at all costs encourages idolatry of the poet, and ascribes to him something very like infallibility. As Mr. Furnival has it, "a siege and a battle, with one bit of light love-making, cannot form a drama, whatever amount of rhetorical patriotic speeches and comic relief are introduced: *Henry V.* is all the play; no one else is really shown except *Fluellen*." A large number—some thirty-five—of the *dramatis personæ* may be dismissed as the merest sketches or shadows, so far as their theatrical effectiveness is concerned. *Falstaff's* followers without *Falstaff* seem bereft of much of their power to entertain; even *Ancient Pistol*, whose humours were probably of a very potent sort in past times, appearing now as a most obsolete and extinct creature; while the absence of a heroine, or of what is called "female interest," gravely reduces the attractiveness of the play from the point of view of a general audience. Nevertheless "Henry V." has enjoyed occasional terms of popularity. In the last

century it was valued, now because of the patriotic and anti-Gallican tone of its oratory, and now because of the opportunity it afforded for mimicking the spectacle of George III.'s coronation. Macready made the play the subject of a "grand revival" at Covent Garden in 1839, and his example was followed in due season by Mr. Phelps at Sadler's Wells, and Mr. Charles Kean at the Princess's. It is one of the misfortunes attending upon these "grand revivals" that they render the public dissatisfied with simpler performances of the poet: after he has appeared in a spangled suit, he can scarcely resume his homely working clothes; and thus there arises some correspondence between a "grand revival" and a "splendid funeral." The decline of dramatic poetry has been dated from the introduction of scenery upon the stage, and the finest descriptive passages of the Elizabethan poets have been attributed to the fact that the theatre of their time was entirely deficient in the matter of painted canvas. It is some years since Hallam wrote that "the prodigality of our stage in its peculiar boast, scene-painting, can hardly keep pace with the creative powers of Shakspeare; it is well that he did not live when a manager was to estimate his descriptions by the cost of realising them on canvas, or we might never have stood with *Lear* on the cliffs of Dover, or amidst the palaces of Venice with *Shylock* and *Antonio*." As a matter of fact, the modern Shakspearean revivalist rejoices in every opportunity of embellishing the poet by employing the scene-painter and spreading as much canvas as possible; an excuse for yet another new picture, the more elaborate the better, is heartily welcomed. Macready has chronicled his delight at perceiving that he could even illustrate the speeches of the *Chorus* in "Henry V." by means of the panoramic paintings of Stanfield.



The version of "King Henry V." now produced at Drury Lane appears to be identical with the arrangement of the text prepared by the late Mr. Charles Calvert for performance at Manchester in 1872; Mr. Calvert afterwards visiting New York to supervise the representation of the play at Booth's Theatre in 1875. Mr. George Rignold, who personates the *King* at Drury Lane, I remember as a promising and energetic young actor at the Court and Queen's Theatres some seven or eight years ago; he played, among other parts, and with success, *Caliban* and *Leonatus Posthumus*. He possesses special physical qualifications for such a character as *Henry V.* Edwin Forrest, appearing in a modern tragedy, "The Gladiator," by Dr. Bird of New York, was required to say at a particular juncture of the story, "I am here to fight!" From his tone and manner and the prodigious muscularity of his movements as he uttered those words, it was unanimously agreed that he was very certainly the man to make good his speech. Something of the kind might be said of Mr. George Rignold. He is most heroically pugnacious of aspect; he looks a born leader of fighting men; he exhibits indefatigable vigour alike as swordsman and orator; he overwhelms his foes both by force of arms and strength of lungs. As, falchion in hand, clothed in complete steel, with a richly emblazoned tabard, he stands in that spot so prized by the histrionic mind, the exact centre of the stage, the limelight pouring upon him from the flies its most dazzling rays, and declaims speech after speech to his devoted followers, he presents as striking a stage figure as I think I ever saw. The actor has gained both in force and in confidence during his absence in the United States, and he has remedied certain of the old defects in his elocutionary system, although in this respect there is still something to

be desired. When he attempts great rapidity of utterance he is apt to become unintelligible; for his voice is strong and sonorous rather than flexible, and a "gabbling" effect in this wise mars certain of his best speeches. He is prone too, to overlong pauses in the midst of his interlocutions, insomuch that the audience was sometimes tempted to think that his memory has suddenly betrayed him, while the prompter had strayed from his post. Mr. Rignold, however, rouses the house to great enthusiasm; his performance of *Henry* was received with extraordinary applause. Of course subtlety of interpretation was not required; *Henry V.* is not an intellectual character; on the stage it is sufficient if he is represented as chivalrous of bearing, manly of form, and sound of wind and limb. I need not trouble myself, therefore, with considering how Mr. Rignold may fare should he attempt the more exacting of the Shakespearean characters. In support of the actor the playbill asserts that 400 auxiliaries are employed; I cannot believe that there are quite so many. Drury Lane is rich in scenery suitable to the legitimate drama, and in costumes, armour, and weapons of a mediæval pattern; the play is presented, therefore, quite in the manner of a "grand revival," if not absolutely with fresh appliances. The speeches of the *Chorus* are well declaimed by Miss Brabrook Henderson; the actress, I think, bore another name when she last appeared in London. Of the other performers I have little to say; but Mr. Calhaem's *Fluellen* and Mr. Odell's *Pistol*, the *Williams* of Mr. Ryder and the *Boy* of Master Grattan, may be mentioned as commendable efforts.

## CXXVIII.

## "THE FALCON."

[St. James's Theatre.—December 1879.]

IN the case of the Laureate's contribution to the stage, some disappointment was perhaps inevitable. The mere announcement of a new work by Mr. Tennyson is sufficient to rouse expectation to an almost unreasonable extent, and the fact was overlooked that "The Falcon" only purported to be a production of slender proportions. It proves to be a dramatic study something after the manner of Alfred de Musset. The French poet, however, usually invented his fables, while Mr. Tennyson has borrowed his subject from Boccaccio. De Musset's plays were hardly designed for representation, and the literary fashion which brought them into favour and prominence has waned considerably of late years; but a certain ardent suggestiveness, a feverish abandonment, distinguished De Musset's writings, and almost compensated for his lack of dramatic expertness. Mr. Tennyson's Muse, apparently, has no natural inclining towards the theatre, and approaches the foot-lights at the risk of singeing her wings. Altogether I think "The Falcon" should have been withheld from representation. It is tender and graceful, and, if it ventures upon few poetic flights, it is rich in the dainty phrases and the

felicities of diction for which the Laureate has always been renowned ; but it is not dramatic ; it moves little interest ; it stands apart from general sympathy. The fault, perhaps, lies as much in the theme as in the treatment. Upon the stage something of grotesqueness is inseparable from the sacrifice of *Federigo's* pet bird ; and when the poet has killed and cooked the falcon, he is in haste to shirk the unpalatable dish, and does not even permit his *dramatis personæ* to taste a morsel of it. In Boccaccio's simpler version of the story, *Monna Giovanni* and the lady who accompanies her to *Federigo's* cottage calmly sit down to table and eat the falcon, "not knowing what it was." Animal life is perhaps more mercifully regarded in these times than once it was ; it seemed to me that the audience were more disposed to sorrow over the death of the bird than to rejoice at the union of the lovers. At any rate, there was a reality about *Federigo's* falcon which did not always extend to *Federigo* and his mistress. They were picturesque of aspect, elegant of attitude, choice of speech, but seemed sometimes deficient in those touches of nature which are understood to make the whole world kin. Mr. and Mrs. Kendal played the lovers with exceeding care and skill, if they failed to sound any specially pathetic note, and left their audience at last comparatively cold. But they delivered their lines most intelligently, were adroit in conducting their scenes while avoiding the conventionalisms of stage effect ; clearly they had not spared painstaking and study. Mr. Kendal sings a plaintive ditty, playing an accompaniment upon the guitar. Mrs. Kendal, clad like the morning in a mantle of golden russet, is most winsome of presence. "The Falcon" may find no abiding place upon the stage ; but the poetic little sketch should be seen by all who concern themselves as to theatrical transactions,

or can take interest in a dramatic experiment which hardly aims at success of a very general or unbounded sort. By and by it may be decided that "The Falcon" can be better enjoyed in the quiet of the library than upon the stage of the St. James's Theatre, with all its refined means and æsthetic appliances.

CXXIX.

"THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW."

[Court Theatre.—December 1870.]

ONE of the most familiar figures of fiction, whether of the theatre or of the circulating library, is the embarrassed father, who, to avert impending bankruptcy, implores or commands his daughter to dismiss the poor lover she adores, and to accept in his stead the rich suitor she abominates. In "The Lady of Lyons" this oppressive parent is called M. Deschappelles; in "The Old Love and the New" he bears the name of Mr. Westbrook. If Pauline had married M. Beauseant, and a child had been born of their union, and if afterwards Claude Melnotte had appeared troublesomely devoted to the young wife and mother, what would have happened? How would poetic justice have dealt with him? Well, in some sort Mr. Bronson Howard's play, successful in America as "The Banker's Daughter," and produced at the Court Theatre with Mr. Albery's revisions and corrections as "The Old Love and the New," may be held to furnish a reply to these inquiries. Claude would have been killed in a duel, say, by M. Glavis; and M. and Madame Beauseant and their child would have lived happily ever afterwards. Mr. Howard's play has been received with exceptional favour, and, upon the whole, the

welcome accorded it was fairly deserved, for in performance it proved to be a better play than has been presented in London for some time past, although that is not saying so very much for it. One of the most amusing of the *dramatis personæ* is a young lady, who, having married a very old husband, looks forward eagerly to becoming, at an early period, his widow and the inheritrix of his enormous wealth. Her state of expectation might seem heartless and repellent to bystanders; but inconvenience of that kind is obviated by the very good looks, the natural humour, and great vivacity of the actress who personates the character. Miss Winifred Emery had previously appeared with credit in the little play called "A Clerical Error," but of course she was then permitted but a poor opportunity of exhibiting her best gifts and graces. As *Mrs. Brown*, the wife, and presently the widow, of a millionaire of seventy-five, Miss Emery obtains real distinction, and proves herself worthy of the name she bears, whether it comes to her by act of others or of her own. Apart from this *Brown* episode, as it may be called, there is little that is new in Mr. Howard's play; but he has studied the modern drama to some purpose; apparently he has sat at many theatrical feasts, and come away laden with scraps. There is awkwardness in his management of the dinner-party in his second act; the characters are arbitrarily compelled to march from the stage in Indian file, so that occasion may be made for the interview of the wife and her lover. The dialogue is often too diffuse, and the story seems sometimes to loiter on its way; but altogether the author has made effective use of his materials, and has supplied the players with valuable opportunities.

Miss Amy Roselle is more successful, I think, in comic than in serious dramas,—“The Old Love and the New”

pertaining to what Dryden describes as "that inferior sort of tragedies which end with a prosperous event,"—but she plays Mr. Howard's heroine with considerable force ; while as the husband, Mr. Coghlan, by his skill in representing passion controlled by a strong will, proves himself anew one of the most accomplished actors of the day. Mr. Leathes is a trifle too mysterious and Mephistophelian, indulges in an excess of broken English as the *Count of Carojac* ; and Mr. David Fisher, an admirable actor of jaunty old age, is not very well suited as the selfish bankrupt who forces his daughter into a distasteful alliance. Mr. Anson is very spirited and comical as an American commercial traveller ; and Mr. Dacre acquits himself creditably as the discomfited lover. The representation was much assisted by the cleverness of Miss Georgie White, a tiny actress of six, who personates the offspring of the marriage "without love," and is mainly instrumental in bringing the story to a happy end.



## CXXX.

## "THE LORD OF THE MANOR."

[Imperial Theatre.—January 1880.]

MR. HERMAN MERIVALE is a cultivated man of letters, boasting skill and experience in the art of writing for the stage: his performances are undoubtedly entitled to respectful consideration. But I think his judgment was at fault when he essayed to dramatise the "*Wilhelm Meister*;" for one thing, it was so much easier not to dramatise the "*Wilhelm Meister*." There probably exist German plays founded upon the novel, and the libretto of the French opera by M. Ambroise Thomas has become a familiar work. I conceive, however, that Mr. Merivale has not sought assistance from these sources, but has independently laboured to accomplish a task he need never have undertaken. Certain stories seemed forced upon the stage as a consequence of the prodigious popularity they enjoy, and without regard to their unfitness for theatrical uses; but from an English point of view the "*Wilhelm Meister*" is not a work of this class. In England the book has been rather admired than read: the general public having calmly allowed the raptures of Carlyle to "pair" with the scorn of De Quincey, who pronounced the impression left upon him by the novel to be one of "entire disgust." But even

those who profess enthusiasm about the work must own that they prize it much more for its philosophy, or its pseudo-philosophy, than for its fiction. As a story, it is admitted to be dull, tedious, incoherent, undramatic. Carlyle himself is constrained to own that, to the great mass of novel-readers—who, after all, are the most important judges of a novel—"Wilhelm Meister" must appear beyond endurance weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable; without romantic interest, heroic sentiments, moving incidents, or palpable characters; and possessing for its hero "a milksop, whom, with all his gifts, it takes an effort to avoid despising."

Mr. Merivale has bestowed upon his play the ill-chosen title of "The Lord of the Manor." The scene is transferred to England, the characters have become English, and the events of the story are supposed to occur some time in the last century. *Wilhelm* appears as *Wilfred Lisle*; *Mignon* as *Sybil*; the old *Harper* as *Crazy Dick*; *Laertes* as *Horatio*, and *Philina* as *Aurora*. The drama is chiefly occupied with the passages of the original which relate the adventures of *Mignon*. A prosperous conclusion is arrived at: the convenient discovery being made that *Sybil* is the long-lost daughter of an Italian marquis, and her life is preserved that she may become the wife of *Wilfred Lisle*. Apparently the dramatist has been much perplexed by a sense of "divided duty:" with one hand he endeavours to preserve Goethe; with the other he labours to suppress him. Now he aims at fidelity to his original; now he seeks to sever all connection with it. Of course the more ethereal and poetic qualities of the novel cannot be retained in the play. How, for instance, could the heroine be presented upon the stage—*Mignon*, "the daughter of enthusiasm, rapture, passion, and despair; of

the earth, but not earthly?" In the theatre Goethe is necessarily depoetised; the story is stripped of its fervour and exaltation, its analytical disquisitions and allegorical significance. What remains is trite enough and without interest. "The Lord of the Manor" is a prosaic drama; its characters are unsympathetic and somewhat incomprehensible. There are certain powerful scenes; and the dialogue, though assuredly weak when it would be comical, is for the most part very well written. There is little in the play to rouse and sustain attention, however; it is curiously deficient in dramatic quality. Moreover, Mr. Merivale has deferred too long the dispersion of the mystery attaching to *Sybil's* origin. The dramatist errs who declines to admit the audience into the secrets of his story. In the present instance, when the disclosure is made at last, there is an inclination to laugh; the effect has been discounted from having been so long held in suspense. The secret has become of the Polichinelle order: everybody knows all about it, and it is told at length to heedless ears.

I wish I could write more favourably of a play which has probably cost its author serious mental effort. I think he would have succeeded better if he had not sacrificed to the existing passion for the matter-of-fact; if he had treated his old-fashioned subject in the old-fashioned way, and, with the aid of rhythm and poetic diction, endeavoured to lift his audience out of association with everyday life, and brought them to believe in the existence of an ideal and sublimated world. He has preferred to be commonplace, however; and certainly his play was received with something like enthusiastic approbation. There was every evidence, indeed, of its most complete success. But, as I need hardly say, the enthusiasm which attends first representations is not to be implicitly trusted. The players did not spare exertion;

but on the whole the author suffered at their hands. The drama needed exceptional interpretation. It was very necessary that *Aurora* should be represented by an actress of rare physical gifts—beautiful, versatile, vivacious, passionate, fascinating, capable of exercising over her audience something of the extraordinary influence she is supposed to possess over *Wilfred Lisle*, the *Wilhelm* of the drama. Such an actress was not forthcoming at the Imperial Theatre. And, truth to say, Mr. William Farren, accomplished artist as he is, served his apprenticeship too long ago to be now an acceptable personator of such a youth as *Wilhelm Meister*. Perhaps the most satisfactory performance of all was that of Mr. Kyrle Bellew as *Horatio*, the actor's inclining towards theatric attitude and restlessness of mien being well in keeping with the character. Mr. Bannister was genuinely droll in a subordinate part; and although the *Sybil* of Miss Lydia Cowell lacked force, it possessed the merits of natural grace and picturesqueness, plaintive delivery and sympathetic manner. It was not, of course, the *Mignon* of Goethe; but it was a fairly commendable portrayal of Mr. Merivale's heroine.

## CXXXI.

## "NINON."

[Adelphi Theatre.—February 1880.]

MR. WILLS'S new play of "Ninon" does not set forth the adventures of the famous Ninon de l'Enclos, but deals with a story of life in Paris during the Reign of Terror, and brings upon the stage such important historic personages as the Dauphin, Marat, and Simon the cobbler. Dramas dealing with the first French Revolution follow and resemble each other a good deal: one knows that in works of the class the audience will be required to sympathise with the cause of fallen royalty, that hairbreadth escapes will abound, that at a particular crisis in the action the guillotine will be exhibited, and that throughout the play supernumeraries will be busy simulating the uproar and violence of the Parisian mob. Nevertheless the subject is not likely soon to lose its theatrical significance, or its power to excite and to fascinate both playwrights and playgoers.

Mr. Wills's hero, the *Count de St. Cyr*, is an inoffensive gentleman enough, whom a vindictive seamstress has resolved to bring to the scaffold because she believes him to be the betrayer of her sister, whose untimely death is understood to have occurred some while before the rising

of the curtain. The seamstress is assisted in her vengeful plot by her father, a very violent old jeweller, and by his distinguished friend *Marat*. *Ninon*, the seamstress, dogs the footsteps of *St. Cyr*, permits him to rescue her from pretended danger in the streets, takes up her abode in his house, worms herself into his confidence to discover that he is a royalist in disguise, tries to win of him his love, and in most unmaidenly manner makes love to him, all with the view of destroying him. Presently she becomes aware, like the lady who acts as Fouché's spy in "Plot and Passion," that she is enamoured of her victim; she learns, too, as he stands upon the brink of the grave to which she has hurried him, that *St. Cyr* is wholly innocent concerning her sister; that of the sins he is charged with, another, basely usurping his name, is really guilty. Everything points to a tragic conclusion. Mr. Wills, however, contrives to patch up matters so that the curtain may fall upon a tolerably comfortable situation. *St. Cyr's* life is spared, and the young nobleman is so incredibly foolish as to marry *Ninon*, notwithstanding the infamy of her conduct; the violent jeweller consenting, while *Marat* stands apart, if baffled, still malignant, with an air that seems to say his time will come, nevertheless; the descent of the curtain bringing about no change whatever in his sentiments.

The story is obviously defective as an appeal to commiseration. Interest is no doubt awakened; there is no lack of robustness about the materials; the spectators are kept on the alert as to what will happen next; and the action of the drama rarely comes to a halt, if it is sometimes much impeded by the "weight of words," the superabundance of dialogue, it is condemned to carry; but "*Ninon*" does not enlist sympathy. Mr. Wills has, I think, failed to see that his heroine is a very sullied sort

of person, that her duplicity is most unworthy, that her calculating cruelty and deliberate baseness merit the heartiest reprobation. It may be answered that he designed his *Ninon* to be repellent and to act vilely, that what she is he from the first fully intended her to be ; but in that case he assuredly risked the condemnation of his play. For a theatrical audience is much as Charles Lamb described himself, "a bundle of prejudices, made up of likings and dislikings, the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies ;" and a heroine possessed of a clean bill of moral health is almost indispensable to dramatic prosperity. And there are other blemishes in "*Ninon*." Mr. Wills seems too often to abandon the main object of his pursuit, as it were, to hunt an episode to death. The introduction of the *Dauphin* and the scene of *Simon's* cruelty in the Temple are scarcely necessary to the play, while the motives actuating *St. Cyr* are often difficult to understand ; his ultimate union with the seamstress being, perhaps, the least explicable of his proceedings. I think, too, that if *Marat* had determined upon the death of *St. Cyr*, he would have found a much shorter way to that result than Mr. Wills conceives him to adopt. I may further note that Mr. Wills supposes the *Dauphin* to have successfully escaped from the Temple and made his way to England ; the events of his after-life being, of course, left outside the scope of the drama.

"*Ninon*" is written with the author's usual force and effect, although sometimes the high-flown and the colloquial are too closely contrasted. The acting left something to be desired. Mr. Neville, perhaps, does all that can be done with the rather ungrateful character of *St. Cyr*, who throughout occupies the position of a dupe and a puppet in the hands of others ; but as *Ninon* Miss Wallis is clearly

overtaxed. The actress seems bent upon displaying intensity of emotion ; but her efforts involve her in the worst of stage tricks, exaggerations of tone and posture, the ranting and raving, the moping and mowing, of a departed histrionic method. Miss Wallis's physical resources are strictly limited, and characters of great passion and vehemence are quite beyond her reach. Mr. Brooke took pains with the part of *Marat*, but did not succeed in investing it with any very strong individuality ; the actor was unfortunate, moreover, in his choice of dress. Mr. Taylor viewed *Simon* as "a part to tear a cat in ;" and Mr. Fernandez, personating the father of *Ninon*, vied with his fellow-player in feats of vociferation.



## CXXXII.

## "THE UPPER CRUST."

[Folly Theatre.—April 1880.]

"THE UPPER CRUST" will rank, I think, among Mr. Byron's most entertaining works. It is true that in dramatic interest "The Upper Crust" is not especially strong, and that it makes little effort to thrill or to excite the audience. The play, however, is faithful to the traditions of its class: it "sports with human follies, not with crimes;" and it may be said to attain completely its simple end in the genuine amusement it occasions. No absolute villain figures upon the scene; a cold-hearted father, who has neglected his offspring, is the most reprehensible of the characters. No interesting forger commits, *currente calamo*, his breaches of the law; nor is the fall of the curtain preceded by the entrance of that type of modern poetical justice, the police-constable, duly provided with handcuffs. Mr. Byron is content to set forth unambitiously the struggles of a worthy and wealthy, but unlettered and ill-mannered, soapboiler to force his way from obscurity to what is known as "the upper crust" of society. A certain *Mr. Barnaby Rudge* has made a large fortune by the manufacture and sale of "Diaphanous Soap." Why, he asks himself, should "swells" look down upon him and

country families hold aloof? No doubt his desire to rise has its despicable side: he is a thorough snob in his reverence for the titled. But his aspirations are not merely on his own account; he has a daughter, a most accomplished young lady, and he is laudably anxious that her social position shall be of a distinguished sort. How he schemes, therefore, that she shall break with her own true lover, a young architect of doubtful parentage, and become the wife of a loutish sporting baronet, *Sir Robert Boobleton*; the mistakes he makes, the humiliations he incurs, and the state of rage into which he is lashed as he becomes more and more baffled and bewildered by the circumstances of the case—these constitute the materials of Mr. Byron's new play, and keep the spectators very constantly amused. When *Mr. Doublechick's* perplexities have been thoroughly exhibited, the dramatist suddenly unties the knot of his story and discloses that the young architect in question is really the rightful heir to a barony, and therefore a more eligible husband for *Miss Doublechick* than he had originally seemed to be. Of course the convenient discovery of a rightful heir is a most familiar solution of a dramatic difficulty. Mr. Byron, however, has contrived to impart a certain freshness of aspect to this commonplace incident. But the strength of "The Upper Crust" does not lie in its story, although this has very decided merits, and is arranged for stage purposes with singular neatness and ingenuity. The comedy enables Mr. Toole to enrich with a new example his already well-stocked collection of comic and grotesque personages; and the dialogue is throughout of Mr. Byron's best. *Mr. Doublechick*, with his good-nature and his vulgarity, his affection for his child, his sense of his own importance and of the value of his money, his ludicrous ambition, his

breadth of humour, his keenness of mother-wit, his explosive anger when his plans miscarry, supplies the play with extraordinary animation and diverts the audience extremely. I remember no recent work of Mr. Byron's in which the endowments and accomplishments of the actor find so much consideration and such excellent opportunity for display. Mr. Toole's efforts, I need scarcely say, are rewarded with very hearty applause. "The Upper Crust" is almost redundantly furnished with jests, witticisms, and "good things;" and these seemed to me to arise more naturally and spontaneously from the converse of the characters than has sometimes been the case with Mr. Byron's dialogue.

*Mr. Doublechick* is, of course, the most important person in the comedy; but the characters of *Lord Hesketh*, the impecunious nobleman who, "for a consideration," undertakes to push the soapboiler's social interests; of *Sir Robert Boobleton*, the clownish baronet, who would wed *Miss Doublechick*; and of *Walter Wrentmore*, the young architect, the mystery of whose origin is at last so comfortably dispelled, are cleverly sketched, are essential to the story, and are represented with skill and artistic effect by Mr. Billington, Mr. Garden, and Mr. Ward respectively. To the merits of Mr. Ward's performance I would particularly invite attention; the young actor's agreeable presence and clear impressive delivery, refinement of manner, and admirable self-control, promise for him a professional position of genuine distinction. The ladies of the story are of minor consequence, and affect its events and progress but indirectly. However, Miss Roland Phillips, a daughter of the late Watts Phillips, draughtsman and dramatist, wins applause by the natural vivacity of her impersonation of *Miss Kate Vennimore* *Lord Hesketh's* niece, who, as the curtain falls, exhibits

willingness to pair with *Sir Robert Boobleton*. No change of scene occurs; a handsome drawing-room in *Mr. Doublechick's* country-house suffices for the entire action of the comedy. In this way Mr. Byron demonstrates anew how well versed he is in the arts of dramatic construction.

## CXXXIII.

## "HEARTSEASE."

[Court Theatre.—May 1880.]

"HEARTSEASE," an adaptation by Mr. Mortimer of the drama of "*La Dame aux Camélias*," introduces to a London audience Madame Helena Modjeska, a lady of Polish nationality, whose histrionic efforts have acquired for her extraordinary fame in the United States. "*La Dame aux Camélias*" has long been a prohibited work in England, and even in France it was not brought upon the stage without very considerable difficulty. But what the virtuous Republican Government of 1848 refused, the less demure Second Empire hastened to concede, and accordingly M. Dumas's play was produced at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in 1852. In English eyes "*La Dame aux Camélias*" can never seem an agreeable or artistic work; it deals with a vicious subject in an insincere manner; it is unfaithful to nature, morbid, hectic, oppressed with false and sickly sentiment. At the same time it must be admitted that M. Dumas has imported into his play certain dramatic effects of a powerful sort, and has provided the actors with opportunities for vehement emotional display. Mr. Mortimer's version does not depart in the main from the original, if in "*Heartsease*" some attempt is made to veil the means by

which the heroine of the story obtains her living, while her relations with the hero are referred to vaguely as an "engagement." However, if these and like small changes have satisfied the licenser, I must marvel at his former obduracy. As the libretto of "La Traviata," M. Dumas's play was allowed performance; it might be sung, but it must not be said, because, as Mr. Donne argued, "if there is a musical version of a piece it makes a difference, for the story is then subsidiary to the music and singing." But this judgment is now reversed, and indeed it was strange any one could ever be found seriously to maintain that music legalised a play, that songs redeemed a subject from sinfulness. After the acceptance of "La Traviata" it was clear that the appearance upon the scene, either in French or English, of "La Dame aux Camélias" could only be a question of time.

The success of Madame Modjeska in the part of *Constance*, as the heroine of "Heartsease" is called—she is *Marguerite* in the French play, and *Violetta* in the Italian opera—was great and genuine; the cordial applause rewarding her exertions was entirely deserved. The lady is an experienced actress, thoroughly versed in all the arts and devices of the stage. She might, with advantage perhaps, have visited this country at an earlier period of her career; but she is still attractive of aspect, singularly graceful of movement; she dresses with refined taste; her voice is sufficiently powerful, and managed and modulated with admirable skill, and she sustains the character she assumes with very special and subtle consistency. I really think that, since Mdlle. Aimée Desclée, I have seen no actress upon the stage so expert as Madame Modjeska in strengthening and enriching her histrionic portrait-painting by means of minute touches, or so curiously practised in the

personal details and individual *finesse* of the business of the scene. She has a foreigner's restlessness and variety of gesture—that free movement of the wrists and fingers which is denied to our native players generally ; but all she does, even to her least considerable actions, seems to pertain naturally to the character she personates, and to further its exhibition and development. Her power of pathetic expression is limited, perhaps ; I have known, at any rate, far less accomplished actresses more apt to draw tears from the audience. But she has passion at command ; she can surrender herself to the nervous excitement of the scenes in which she appears ; and she is able to communicate to the spectators something of her own emotional stir and strife, and to rouse and to retain their commiseration. In the last act—devoted to the death of the heroine, and, as Little Dorrit's friend Maggie says, “almost as good as a hospital”—Madame Modjeska is to be commended for her moderation. The ghastly details in which some actresses have delighted she deals with discreetly, retrenching them as much as possible. In this last scene, indeed, her art, I think, was seen at its best, although the hysterical outbursts closing the fourth act obtained more recognition from the audience.

Altogether Madame Modjeska's performance is unquestionably interesting, and should attract many visitors to the Court Theatre. At the same time it must be understood that the representation has its drawbacks. The actress is a foreigner, and the fact is as an inharmonious note in a concert of music : her ways are not the ways of her play-fellows, who, let it be conceded, do not lack capacity ; she seems remitted to a position of isolation, because of the discrepancies between her histrionic manner and theirs. Moreover, while her English may not be described as

"broken"—it is articulate enough, and she rarely misplaces an emphasis—her strong foreign accent has to be forgiven her. To my thinking, it is very hard to forgive a foreign accent in an English play upon the English stage. Our players should be among the chief custodians of the language; we should hear from them the most perfect pronunciation, the finest elocution. I admit, however, that we do not exactly obtain this from them; that the facts of the case are in opposition to its theories, and that the general public does not mind in the least. Nevertheless I have noticed that the alien or exotic performer begins to pall upon the audience at an earlier period than does the native player. The foreigner does not last or continue to content nearly so long. It would be easy to cite examples if it were necessary.



## CXXXIV.

## "THE CORSICAN BROTHERS."

[Lyceum Theatre.—September 1880.]

THE late Alexandre Dumas first told the famous story of "Les Frères Corses," if I remember rightly, in one of his *Impressions de Voyage*, books of travel which, consisting rather of fable than of fact, were generally pronounced to be far more valuable and entertaining than the writings of ordinary or of less extraordinary travellers. A contribution to *Ainsworth's Magazine* for August 1845, entitled "The Sympathy of the Twin-born"—a condensed translation of M. Dumas' narrative—perhaps first introduced MM. Fabien and Louis dei Franchi to English notice. M. Dumas professed that, while travelling in Corsica, he had been hospitably received by the *Comtesse Savilia dei Franchi* at her château in the village of Sullacaro; that in due time he became the friend of her twin-sons, learnt of the mysterious sympathy existing between them, of the love of *Louis* for the beautiful *Emilie de Lesparre*, and of the villany of *M. Château Renaud*; further, that he was present, if not as a second, at any rate as a sympathetic spectator, at the two duels of the Corsicans with the Frenchman: the duels, by the by, being fought at Vincennes with pistols, not at Fontainebleau with swords—

and *Louis* being warned of danger threatening him by the spectre of his deceased *father*. This story, considerably altered, expanded, and embroidered by the playwrights, MM. Grange and Montépin, was produced in melodramatic form upon the stage of the Théâtre Historique—of which Dumas was still manager, I think—on the 10th of August 1850. Mr. Boucicault's English edition of the drama of "*Les Frères Corses*" was first presented at the Princess's Theatre in February 1852. It is Mr. Boucicault's "*Corsican Brothers*" that Mr. Irving has now produced at the Lyceum Theatre. Many other versions of the play exist; for eight-and-twenty years ago a sort of passion possessed our London managers to present their patrons with "*The Corsican Brothers*" in some form or other. The subject was now treated seriously and now burlesqued, as "*O Gemini, or Brothers of Course*," as "*The Camberwell Brothers*," and even as "*The Coarse-Haired Brothers!*" There was talk too of an operatic "*Corsican Brothers*," with music by Balfe, the words by Fitzball, and the twins personated by Mr. Sims Reeves. But this project was never carried into execution. I may add that Mr. Boucicault's version was much preferred to its rivals. The adaptor's tact and skill in selection, compression, and contrivance found clear demonstration, indeed, when a literal rendering of the original play—very long, elaborate, and cumbrous, in five, six, or seven acts, I forget which—was presented at Drury Lane about 1855, for the behoof of that robustious tragedian with the deepest of voices—who perished in the wreck of the *London*, 1866, and is now nearly forgotten—Gustavus V. Brooke.

The vitality at present enjoyed by "*The Corsican Brothers*" seems to me entirely due to the success obtained by Charles Kean in the play, and to the fame of

that success. Labouring under many physical disadvantages—plain of face, discordant of voice, inelegant of figure—Charles Kean yet owned something of the terrible earnestness of his father; he had been schooled in tragedy, and he could greatly impress his public by a certain calm, controlled, nervous intensity of manner, a measured energy of delivery, a merciless murderous inflexibility of tone and expression, which made his more melodramatic impersonations specially memorable. His audience were set shuddering, and remained spellbound, they scarcely knew how or why. When Fechter, the original representative of *Fabien* and *Louis*, undertook those characters upon the London stage, he found himself prejudged and forestalled: his many gifts and graces, his ease of bearing, his picturesque aspect, his air of romance, were completely outbidden and overpowered by the memories of the force and weight, the deadly purpose, of Charles Kean's performance, the atmosphere of awe and mystery which had seemed to attend his presence upon the scene. It is to the example of Charles Kean, and not of Fechter, that we owe, as I think, Mr. Irving's revival of the play, with a luxury of decoration and a lavishness of spectacle it has never hitherto enjoyed.

The personation of the twins is taxing, perhaps, rather to the physical than the intellectual resources of the actor, and of course presents no real difficulty to so accomplished an artist as Mr. Irving. Now and then, as I judged, his efforts were marred by a lack of repose and certainty of manner; he was needlessly restless of movement, and varied his tones of voice too frequently. He was very frank and gallant of mien in his Corsican home in the first act, however, if his dress suggested somewhat too much the showy velvet-clad brigand of opera and ballet; very

pleasant with the quarrelsome *Colonna* and *Orlando*, and told the story of the apparition admirably. As the love-sick student *Louis* of the second act the actor was unduly sombre and inert, and looked scarcely young enough. This may have been due to the style of dress. Nothing turns upon the date of the story, which, referred to the past, or supposed to set forth recent occurrences, is as true or as untrue either way as anybody could possibly desire. But it has pleased Mr. Irving to reproduce the tight-fitting, high-shouldered, stiff-necked costumes of what may be called the D'Orsay epoch, when there were still dandies extant, and men wore their hair long and the brims of their hats curly; and these fashions undoubtedly now impart a look of age to those adopting them. In the last act Mr. Irving as *Fabien* denounced with effective energy the murderer of *Louis dei Franchi*, and fought the famous duel capitally, receiving excellent support from Mr. Terriss, whose *Château Renaud*, however, was a less weighty and consummate villain than the stage was accustomed to in the days of Mr. Walter Lacy and the late Alfred Wigan. The success of the revival seemed quite beyond question. Mr. Irving was rewarded for his enterprise and exertions by salvoes of the heartiest applause. Miss Fowler lent grace and intelligence to the small part of *Madame de Lesparre*, and Miss Pauncefort appeared as the mother of the twins. The scenes of the hall of the château, of the interior of the opera, of the *salon* in the house of *M. de Montgiron*, and of the snow-littered glade in the Forest of Fontainebleau must be counted among the most perfect of stage pictures. Mr. Hamilton Clarke I was glad to find had preserved the well-remembered tremulous tune popularly known as "The Ghost Melody"—re-scoring it, I think,—while for the masquerade at the opera-house he has

supplied abundantly dance music of most fresh, graceful, and sparkling quality. The surprising brilliance of this scene, with its floods of light and colour, its numberless dancers, its variety of costumes and characters, its real fountains and real flowers and shrubs, its stir, movement, and spirit, mark the advance in stage management and inventiveness since the times of Charles Kean—no mean contriver of spectacle, by the way. There seemed to be armies of Pierrots, Punches, and Débardeurs; but I sought in vain for a Postilion de Lonjumeau, who assuredly would have been present at an opera-ball in 1840. The dancers looked like animated sketches by Gavarni. But one more note. No improvement has been attempted in the matter of the ghost. That apparition is still solid and substantial, rising inch by inch as he moves, or is moved, sideways across the scene—the old, genuine, admired, and thoroughly established ghost of “The Corsican Brothers”—unlike any other ghost ever seen, heard, or dreamt about in this world, or probably elsewhere.

CXXXV.

"MARY STUART."

[Court Theatre.—October 1880.]

AN English version of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* was produced at Covent Garden Theatre some sixty years ago, and occasionally there have been brief revivals of the tragedy upon our stage; but it occupies no very secure place in the repertory. Genest, in his *History of the Stage*, referring to the Covent Garden performance, concisely described the play as "very interesting as to its first and part of the fifth act, the second and fourth acts being rather dull, and the third absurd." Genest is to be valued much more for the facts he records than for the opinions he expresses, and it must be remembered that he was a great stickler for historical accuracy. He could not tolerate the notion of *Elizabeth* and *Mary* meeting in Fotheringay Park and there interchanging angry speeches; yet this scene of royal controversy and recrimination, which occurs in the third act of the tragedy, provides it with its most exciting moments, and affords the stage representatives of the rival queens their best opportunities. Otherwise, the intense pathos of the last act notwithstanding, *Mary Stuart* is an undramatic and oppressive work; it is deficient in action, its length is prodigious, and the characters are apt to engage

in endless discussions—they are for ever “wanting to argue.” The poet’s departures from fact are not of much consequence in relation to the theatrical effectiveness of his play. Miscellaneous audiences are not really well versed in history, nor do they resent such tamperings with actuality as tend to the promotion of dramatic interest. So that *Md̄ry* is at last executed, no “compunctious visitings” trouble the average playgoer concerning the supposed love of *Lord Leicester* or of *Sir Edward Mortimer* for the Scottish queen, or as to other equally strange incidents in Schiller’s play. A far more serious deficiency is the absence of national character and sentiment. There are scenes and passages in *Mary Stuart* that might have been devised and written by Victor Hugo, they are so thoroughly un-English. In this regard the character of *Elizabeth* is especially untrue, or, as Carlyle has expressed it, “more like one of the French Medici than like our own polite, capricious, coquettish, imperious, yet, on the whole, true-hearted Queen Bess.”

No doubt the tragedy, for all its wearisome voluminousness, lives as an acting play, because the character of *Mary* offers many temptations to an actress possessed of certain physical attributes and real tragic power. *Mary* has been represented in French by Rachel, and in Italian by Ristori; and it may be said at once that Madame Modjeska, for whose sake an English version of the play has been produced, by her portrayal of the character, proves herself well worthy to rank with its most illustrious interpreters. Acting more subtle or refined, more passionate and powerful, than Madame Modjeska presents in the part of *Mary Stuart* can rarely have been seen upon the stage. Of course the lady’s strong foreign accent has to be forgiven her; at times this hampers her elocutionary efforts

sadly ; and in truth, although *Mary* may fairly be accounted an alien princess, speaking English with some restraint, a foreign accent in an English play of tragic complexion is always a misfortune. This allowed for, however, there is nothing but applause to award to Madame Modjeska's performance. The lady is fully endowed with those physical gifts and graces which the part and its traditions demand : she is most picturesque of aspect ; she bears herself with a sort of royal elegance ; she employs the most sympathetic tones of a singularly musical voice ; and by every glance and movement of face, change of attitude or of gesture, she adds new colour and effect to her impersonation, fortifying and perfecting it. She discovers new resources, too, in the wrathful explosion to which she yields herself at the close of the third act, the vituperative storm which for a while fairly demolishes her opponent and drives her from the stage. Yet, in the whirlwind of her passion, there is no forfeiture of womanly grace or declension into extravagance ; her vehemence no more becomes rant than passionate music becomes discord. She dresses in admirable taste—not splendidly, for the Queen is deposed and a captive—but with a certain rich and harmonious sobriety, and has the advantage of "looking the character" as probably no other actress now upon the stage could succeed in doing. Her triumph was quite beyond question ; she moved the audience, indeed, to very special manifestations of approval.

The play has been newly and skilfully arranged for representation by the Hon. Lewis Wingfield, who might perhaps be encouraged to continue the work of retrenchment and reform ; certain of the scenes still move heavily from the prolixity of the dialogues, and the last act suffers much from undue protraction. The situation is so sad in



itself that there is really no need for strong insistence upon its dismal character: in this way *Mary's* elaborate preparations for the scaffold, last dying words, and painful parting from her attendants verge upon the morbid; while the curtain should certainly be allowed to descend the moment the Queen has quitted the stage: one wants nothing more after that. As *Queen Elizabeth* Miss Moodie is certainly spirited, although she may lack power and majesty and personal resemblance to the heroine she represents. In the part of *Leicester* Mr. Clayton does not find very congenial occupation. But Mr. Clayton is always an artist; he never once relaxes his hold of the character he has undertaken, nor misses a chance of impressing it upon the audience; he is always watchful to support and assist the general effect of the representation, and having secured the attention of the spectators, takes care to occupy and retain it by the alertness, intelligence, and energy of his efforts. The other characters are represented creditably enough; at least, the players do not offend if they do not win much distinction. The scenic accessories are in very good taste, while Mr. Beverly's landscape representing Fotheringay Park and Castle is particularly to be commended.

CXXXVI.

"WILLIAM AND SUSAN."

[St. James's Theatre.—October 1880.]

CERTAIN critics have described Mr. Wills's "William and Susan" as a "rehabilitation" of Douglas Jerrold's "Black-Eyed Susan. Is that sufferer "rehabilitated" who, unnecessarily operated upon, and deprived of his more important limbs and organs, succeeds in escaping from the ruthless hands of his surgeon and dissector and tormentor? Art, it is true, may have supplied the unhappy patient with mechanical in lieu of his natural members, with eyes of glass and toes of cork; but, nevertheless, he can hardly be regarded as sound and entire, thoroughly his own man again, "rehabilitated" in the legal sense of the word—reinstated in the rights of which a judicial sentence had dispossessed him. "William and Susan" at the St. James's Theatre is not an old play revived, with certain transpositions and omissions justified and rendered expedient by lapse of time or change of taste. Mr. Wills, while professing to found his drama upon "Black-Eyed Susan," has, in fact, totally sunk and destroyed two out of Douglas Jerrold's three acts. The management pleads that Mr. Blanchard Jerrold, the dramatist's son, has sanctioned Mr. Wills's proceeding. I cannot think that, in the circumstances, Mr.

Blanchard Jerrold's sanction of that he was powerless to prevent is of the slightest value. Would Cibber and Tate, and other adapters and mutilators of Shakspeare, have occupied a better position in the judgment of the world had their cobblings and tinkering received the sanction of the poet's descendants? Yet the critics who censure Cibber applaud Mr. Wills. It may be said that a melodrama by Jerrold is not to be classed with the plays of Shakspeare. Yet the same principle is involved, let the author's name be Shakspeare or Jerrold, or, as Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz would add, "Pickwick or Noakes or Stoakes or Stiles or Brown or Tompson." How, for instance, would Mr. Wills like his "Charles the First" to be revised and retrenched, altered and added to, by Messrs. Meritt and Pettitt, let me say, though I design no offence to those dramatists in, for a moment, availing myself of their names?

After all, Jerrold's "Black-Eyed Susan," if a little old-fashioned, is not such a very obsolete work. It is a picture—somewhat crudely coloured, it may be—of a past epoch; it is constructed after a straggling fashion, and includes many of those changes of scene—those sudden meetings and partings of "flats"—which modern stage-managers deprecate and eschew. But Jerrold never wrote coarsely or vulgarly: he was essentially an author of refinement; and there is nothing in any of his plays that need be judged wounding to the susceptibilities even of Miss Podsnap and her class. "Black-Eyed Susan" is not a mere Surrey piece; it has been represented with success at every London theatre of pretence—including, of course, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket. It still keeps possession of the stage. A few weeks since it was prosperously performed for many nights at the Duke's Theatre, with Mr. Rignold as *William*—a very excellent *William*, by the way; and

until now Mr. and Mrs. Kendal—Mr. Wills's *William* and *Susan* at the St. James's Theatre—have been content to appear as the *William* and *Susan* of Douglas Jerrold, nor seemed to pine for the transforming, meddling, and idealising influence of Mr. Wills. The sole excuse, therefore, for the existence of "William and Susan" must consist in its superiority to "Black-Eyed Susan." Is, then, Mr. Wills's the better play? I cannot think so. Certainly it troubles the stage-carpenters less; the scenes in Mr. Wills's two acts are confined to pictures of the interior of *William's* cottage and of a Common near Deal; in other respects it seems to me that the advantage lies with Douglas Jerrold. Mr. Wills is not a humorist, and apparently he objects to the humour of others. He has sought to improve the play by purging it of almost its every joke, its every sparkle of wit, as a man might hope to lighten a ship by plucking and flinging away the feathers of all the fowls on board. "William and Susan" is a doleful and depressing work. The heroine is throughout "like Niobe, all tears;" while *William*, deprived of his jests, his yarns, his nautical metaphors, his hornpipe, and the sea-breezy flavour that was wont to attend him, becomes a very dull and commonplace person; sentence of death seems to hang over him from the first. Jerrold's play succeeded because of its pleasantness, not less than because of its pathos. Mr. Wills has struck out all the pleasantness—the characters are not allowed even a smile upon any pretence—and has over-accentuated the pathos, dwelling upon it and augmenting it in every possible way. The result is exceeding dismalness. Nor can it be said that the play has gained one jot in probability or in resemblance to nature by Mr. Wills's efforts to improve and exalt it. Mr. Wills often writes admirably, but he has never shown himself expert as a playwright, and he is

here seen at his clumsiest. Burlesque is approached when *Captain Crosstree* calls at *Susan's* cottage to ask her to dance with him, and when the *Admiral*, in full dress, with a staff of officers in attendance, promenades Deal Common to present a copper token to a seaman before the mast; while the conversion of *Captain Crosstree* into a deliberate villain, cherishing during many years a design to effect the betrayal of *Susan*, and subjecting her virtue to violent assault, while she is still weeping the departure of her husband, is not merely maladroitness, but is in the very worst taste. The rough expedient of the older play—the accidental tipsy rudeness of the *Captain*, suddenly perceived and resented by *William*—was really far more artistic. Do we live in such squeamish times that intoxication may not be exhibited upon the boards of the St. James's Theatre? Must the *Cassios* of the future get, not drunk, but merely exhilarated by an overdose of zoedone or ginger-beer, or some other harmless non-alcoholic mixture? According to the ruling of "*William and Susan*," it is lawful in stage-plays for a man to conduct himself outrageously to a woman, provided always that he is perfectly sober the while.

Mr. and Mrs. Kendal appear to find pleasure in personating *William* and *Susan*; but I do not think the parts particularly suited to their histrionic method. Their best successes have been obtained in comedies of a drawing-room order; they seem deficient in simplicity and sincerity in these characters derived from humble life; their airs of homely earnestness and excitement are too manifestly artificial. They play cleverly, of course; they always play cleverly—they would play *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth* cleverly; but their efforts are not, I think, wholly convincing or satisfying. Mr. Kendal, if he does not look very sailor-like, and his voice, from its peculiar quality, is with

difficulty attuned to pathos, is very manly and energetic, winning his chief applause in the third act, which Mr. Wills has left unadulterated. Mrs. Kendal unwisely cumbers herself with a quasi-Yorkshire dialect; and in her desire to be lowly occasionally becomes *Audrey*-like; but she plays with unflagging spirit, and distributes many happy touches over her performance. In the last act she yields to the temptation to exaggerate the distresses of the situation—which is trying enough in all conscience—and her final prayer, pointedly addressed to the gallery, should surely be excised. Mr. Hare furnishes a highly finished cabinet portrait of the *Admiral*; and Mr. Wenman is most effective as *Truck*, the second villain of the story, counting as the first *Captain Crosstree*, played with sound force and discretion by Mr. Barnes. All the scenic accessories are complete and accurate, "even to the gaiter buttons," as Marshal Lebœuf said on a memorable occasion. The play was received with loud applause and copious tears; the audience seemed thoroughly to enjoy the miseries the management had provided.

## CXXXVII.

## "ANNE-MIE."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—November 1880.]

THE melodrama of "Anne-Mie, presented in London by the Dutch company last season, has been skilfully adapted to the English stage. No doubt the work has its weakness: the story is scarcely substantial enough to bear the author's diffuse method of narrating it; the superabundant supply of what is called "local colour" sometimes threatens to obscure the design altogether; and certain of the characters seem indistinctly conceived or inconsistently developed. There is exaggeration about the frenzied remorse of the old man *Dirksen*, who has undergone three years' imprisonment for the almost justifiable offence of stabbing, not slaying, the seducer of his daughter; and it is hard to account for the occasional lapses into sentimentalism of *Jan Schuif*, nicknamed "the Fiend," and regarded generally as an irredeemable wretch, a villain of the deepest dye. "Anne-Mie" interests, however, if in no very powerful degree; it may be safely said indeed that the drama will prove satisfactory to those playgoers who are tolerably supplied with patience. The dialogue would certainly be improved by condensation, and I think the performance would gain considerably in effect if sundry of the subordinate characters

were reduced to a still more subordinate condition, One change made by the adapter strikes me as a mistake. He has converted the betrayer of poor *Anne-Mie* into an Englishman, and this introduction of a foreign element is rather disturbing to the general harmony of the subject. When all is so thoroughly and laboriously Dutch, the figure of the Englishman in his tweed suit is as a blot upon the picture. There is also this objection: the marriage of the Englishman with *Anne-Mie* would not, according to English law, really legitimate her child *Lise*, born out of wedlock. The dramatist lays so much stress upon the legitimacy of *Lise*—her union with her lover, *Koenraad Deel*, depending upon the removal of all suspicion touching her birth and status—it is unfortunate that she should only be legitimated at last in a partial or one-sided way. However, could it have been shown that *Lise* was really the lawful child of *Herbert Russell*, the civil engineer, the drama would have suffered some loss of national character; *Lise* would then become an English subject.

Great pains have been taken with the accessories of the play, and altogether more perfect stage-pictures of Dutch life and character can hardly have been seen. The national costumes have been carefully copied, and the scene-painters have provided admirable views of *Anne-Mie's* home, *Kwak's* inn, and the village of Heer-Arendskerke. Miss Geneviève Ward's performance of *Anne-Mie* is much to be commended for its strict fidelity to nature, its quiet force, its exceeding tenderness, its artistic completeness. Of course the actress is seen to more advantage in the later portions of the drama, when *Anne-Mie* appears as the mother of *Lise*, than in the first act, devoted to the youthful life of the heroine, before *Dirksen* has learnt of his daughter's fall from virtue and drawn his knife upon her betrayer. The



actress, gifted with a voice of most melodious quality, has acquired special elocutionary skill ; her speeches, delivered without effort, never fail in significance and impressiveness. Those more vehement displays of emotion which, on previous occasions, Miss Ward has shown that she has absolutely at command, are not necessary to the personation of the simple, self-repressed, and sorrowing burgher-woman, *Anne-Mie*. It would be difficult, however, to surpass the pathetic power of her scenes of devoted affection, contrition, and confession with her child. Here, it should be said, useful support is given to the drama by Miss C. Grahame's careful performance of *Lise*. Mr. Forbes Robertson is gallant and pleasant as the lover, *Koenraad* ; the unsatisfactory Englishman, the violent *Dirksen*, and the wicked *Jan Schuif* finding tolerable interpretation at the hands of Messrs. Bruce, Fernandez, and Flockton ; while Mrs. Leigh Murray provides an animated sketch of the brisk and energetic village hostess *Neeltje Kwak*.

CXXXVIII.

"HAMLET."

[Princess's Theatre.—November 1880.]

THE old Princess's Theatre—it was not so very old : hardly forty years—has given place to a new building, very commodious as to its arrangements, with spacious halls, saloons, and corridors, a raised roof, a widened stage, and profuse decorations, rather overpowering in the fresh brilliance of their painting, carving, and gilding. Time, no doubt, will sober this garnishness of aspect, and even tone down the too bright crimson of the satin draperies, which now shed rather heated reflections upon the auditory. The tiers of boxes protrude curiously, approaching the stage something after the fashion adopted in the vanished Théâtre Historique, built by Alexandre Dumas ; and, generally, it may be said that the comfort of the public has been greatly considered. Good views of the stage seem obtainable from all parts of the house, and incongruous complaints that the spectators cannot see are not likely any longer to be audible.

The new theatre opened with a performance of "Hamlet," introducing the American tragedian, Mr. Edwin Booth, who may be accounted new to our playgoers of to-day, albeit he fulfilled an engagement some years since at the Haymarket Theatre, when, for various reasons, his exertions

obtained for him but a moderate measure of success. Mr. Booth is now a mature actor, too, mature, perhaps, to appear advantageously as "young *Hamlet*;" for though veteran, and even patriarchal, *Hamlets* have been applauded upon our stage, the players in such case have usually grown grey, as it were, in the service of the public, and their age has been forgiven them because their more youthful years have been prized and famous. Born and trained in America, the son of the English actor Junius Brutus Booth—the copyist, so the critics wrote: the rival, and even the superior, so his admirers maintained, of Edmund Kean—Mr. Edwin Booth is clearly an actor of the Kean school. He is low of stature, compact of figure; he moves easily and gracefully, if he moves too often—sometimes with a harlequin's suddenness; he is very mannered; but he is thoroughly skilled in all the business of the scene. He is dark-complexioned, wearing something of an Italian look, and saturnine of expression; he urges to grimace his adroit play of face—knits and unknits, lowers and lifts, his brows—rolls this way and that his eyeballs unceasingly, and even distressingly; he permits himself an excess of gesture; his "manual eloquence," as it has been called, is certainly redundant; his hands wave or smooth, scoop or saw, the air, or are shaken aloft in an alarmed or deprecatory manner, with a frequency that is wearying and irritating. His voice, showing some signs of wear and tear, is yet admirably resonant and of good compass; he speaks like a trained elocutionist, distinctly and incisively, although prone here and there to a certain drawling emphasis, and now and then, as when he observed to *Ophelia* that a great man's memory might "outlive his life *haff a year*," betraying an American method of utterance and pronunciation. His histrionic style is remarkable for its energy and alertness, its neatness and

nimbleness ; he is always intelligent, ingenious, busy, intent upon the full exhibition of the character he personates, of giving all possible point and effect to the speeches he delivers. Some new readings he affects : he prefers, for instance, the "ennobled queen" of the first folio to "mobled queen," the more accepted reading ; and he departs from the old stage traditions in assuming occasionally a familiar manner in passages that have often been pompously declaimed, the while he sits, lounges, or reclines, with an air the elder players would have judged to be too unheroic, if not absolutely indecorous. He is not princely ; his liveliness comes too near to flippancy ; and his conduct during the play-scene seemed deficient in earnestness, as though the *King's* enforced betrayal of his guilt had really something comical about it. He has no special command of pathetic expression ; his great scene with *Ophelia* was more forcible than tender, and suffered also from the old-fashioned habits of constant action, of tossing up the arms and striding to and fro, which, I believe, Edmund Kean first imported into the representation of "Hamlet." As it appeared to me, Mr. Booth's chief success was won in the first act, when his voice was at its freshest and firmest—its strength waned and its tones flattened, unfortunately, as the play proceeded—when his manner was as yet new to the audience, and before his defects as an actor had become too manifest. His first soliloquy was also his best ; he seemed afterwards to repeat his efforts with weakened resources, as though, bent upon making at once a decided impression, he had exerted himself too prodigally at the outset of the performance. His scenes with *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern*—and especially his interview with them after the play of "The Mousetrap"—were, I thought, contrived with much address. He was bitterly yet quietly scornful,

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and refrained from that splenetic explosiveness to which certain *Hamlets* have descended, even to snapping in twain the innocent "recorder" produced by the *Players*. Altogether, so far as a first judgment after one hearing can be trusted, Mr. Booth's *Hamlet* is a spirited, elaborate, painstaking, and expert but conventional performance. He presents essentially the *Hamlet* of the stage, with variations and embroideries of immaterial quality, and not the *Hamlet* of the student of Shakspeare. His chief aim is theatrical effectiveness of the old-established sort. His *Hamlet*, in truth, may be said to be the *Hamlet* of the past. Often I found myself reminded of the *Hamlet* of Mr. Charles Kean: if I missed his physical demerits, I missed also his intensity, his special power of startling and kindling his audience. It may be that what is chiefly lacking to Mr. Booth's labours is a leaven of genius. This the actor possibly possesses; his friends and fellow-countrymen assert as much very positively. But, as I judge, this valuable element does not manifest itself in his performance of *Hamlet*.

Comparisons are reprehended, but in regard to them there exist no total abstiners. Witnessing Mr. Booth's assumption of *Hamlet*, it was impossible to dismiss from the mind all thought of Mr. Irving's well-known and admired personation of the character. I will not pretend to determine in a line or two the advantages enjoyed by one performer over the other. But a few words upon the subject I may venture to write. Something the Englishman might gain if he could emulate the American's promptness, vigilance, decisiveness of manner, ease of action, and freedom of limb. But, as I think, the *Hamlet* of Mr. Irving is to be preferred in that it is more picturesque, more poetic, more intellectually interesting, and altogether more genuinely Shakspearian.

CXXXIX.

"RICHELIEU."

[Princess's Theatre.—November 1880.]

THE late Lord Lytton's "*Richelieu*," first presented in the year 1839, is a poor play enough, viewed as a work of art ; but the part of *Richelieu* continues to be dear to the players ; it assures them of so much applause ; it provides so many opportunities for histrionic flourish and parade. The author wrote almost at the dictation of Macready—then the manager of Covent Garden Theatre—who for some time entertained grave doubts touching the prospects of "*Richelieu*." "I fear it will not do, cannot be made effective," he recorded in his journal. Various changes were introduced at his suggestion, the dramatist now resisting and now yielding to the proposals of the actor. "But when," writes Macready, "I developed the object of the whole plan of alterations, he was in ecstasies. I never saw him so excited, several times exclaiming he was 'enchanted,' and observing, in high spirits, 'What a fellow you are!'" It may be conjectured that Macready's suggestions tended to the aggrandisement of the leading part, if not to the dwarfing of the other characters. As *Richelieu* Macready obtained signal success ; and when the time came for his abandonment of the Cardinal's robes,

they were assumed by his legitimate successor, Mr. Phelps, and by other tragedians went to sustain what is called "leading business," "Richelieu" taking rank as a "stock piece." It was in 1873 that Mr. Irving first essayed the character.

The stage *Richelieu* is a curious compound of exalted patriotism and grovelling cunning: he is now a grim jester and now a fervid patriot; he deals both in lively banter and lofty rhetoric; he is now sarcastic as Iago, and anon passionate as *Lear*; he is the vital principle of the play, however, which becomes inert and lifeless enough when he is absent from the scene. To the loves of *Adrien de Mauprat* and *Julie de Mortemar* little interest attaches; while the proceedings of the conspirators, constrained by the dramatist to play the geese to *Richelieu's* fox, are scarcely at any time intelligible, or seem always woefully deficient in common sense. Their simplicity in believing their foe to have really expired when he has but simulated death is certainly surprising; they have gathered about his couch, he lies stretched out before them, yet, for fear of disturbing the plans of the author, no one is courageous or curious enough to put forth a hand, and make sure of the facts of the case. The play lacks a substantial story and continuity of interest. Thackeray, reviewing "*Richelieu*" in *Fraser's Magazine*, which had many readers forty years ago, complained of the play's "disagreeable bustle and petty complication of intrigue." He continued: "It always seemed to me as if one heard doors perpetually clapping and banging; one was puzzled to follow the train of conversation in the midst of the perpetual small noises that distracted one right and left." The audience are kept on the alert, however, by the persistent effort made to substitute abundance of incident for strength of plot; while of

pungent dialogue, smart sayings, and pompous blank verse, the husks of poetic thought, if not quite the thought itself, there is a very plentiful supply.

Mr. Edwin Booth, although in some measure he is to be considered as an old-fashioned actor, treats *Richelieu* after a new and original manner. Special stress is laid upon *Richelieu's* airs of gallantry and vanity; his age and infirmities are exhibited in a more comical light than has hitherto been permitted to shine upon them. There is something that reminds one of Mr. Phelps's strongly-limned rendering of *Lord Ogleby*—a performance Mr. Booth can scarcely have witnessed—in this new impersonation of *Richelieu* by the American actor. The physical attributes and failings of the Cardinal are much insisted on. His weakness of health is shown by the slowness and tremulousness of his movements, by the quavering of certain of his tones, by his "hacking" cough which ensues upon the slightest exertion, and constantly drives him to his lozenge or comfit box. The representation is remarkable both for its elaboration and its force. The portraits of *Richelieu* have been closely followed; the actor's face has been "made up" with peculiar art; he has been choice as to his costumes, and altogether has secured great picturesqueness of aspect. A tendency to excessive play of face and gesticulation seems habitual to him; he delights in strong and sudden effects; and sometimes, it must be said, his zeal and his energy urge him too near the confines of extravagance. A trained elocutionist, and gifted with a voice of rare power and compass, he is always audible; his sagacity as an actor enabling him to give keen point and singular significance to his speeches, if he now and then inclines to over-emphasis, or to that staccato system of delivery—detaching syllables and even dislocating words



for the sake of exceeding distinctness—which was so much affected by players of the last generation. In the earlier passages of the play Mr. Booth wins applause by his adroitness and ingenuity as an actor of defined and almost humorous character, and his power to personate; in the later scenes he demonstrates his fine command of tragic vehemence and passion. *Richelieu's* great speeches denouncing *Barradas* and invoking the powers of the Church in aid of the persecuted *Julie* are delivered with extraordinary vigour and virulence, the oratorical frenzy of the actor's manner exercising an electrical effect upon the audience, greatly exciting them, and urging them to most enthusiastic applause. The success of Mr. Booth as *Richelieu* was indeed very complete. His performance proved him to be an artist of real distinction. That as an actor he adheres strenuously to the traditions and artifices of the theatre must be accepted as one of the conditions attendant upon his performance; he is "stagy" certainly, but then "*Richelieu*" is a particularly "stagy" play. Indeed, it may be said generally of Lord Lytton's dramatic compositions that they seem to be expressly devised to inculcate and stimulate "staginess." In any case, Mr. Booth as *Richelieu* is not more "stagy" than have been his predecessors in the part. That the American tragedian has very completely gratified the patrons of the Princess's Theatre cannot be questioned.

CXL.

"ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR."

[Court Theatre.—December 1860.]

ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR was Rachel's first prose part, her first step out of the classical repertory. MM. Scribe and Legouvé had expressly contrived the drama for her, taking care to provide her with sufficient opportunities for display ; but she was hardly to be enticed : she was so devoted to the old poets that she could show little consideration to the new playwrights. For six months they were left uncertain as to whether she would or would not appear as their heroine. It then seemed to them that they had better offer the character to Mdle. Rose Chéri. Forthwith Rachel made up her mind : "Adrienne Lecouvreur" was read anew at the Théâtre Français, and represented upon its stage for the first time on the 14th April 1849. Rachel's success was very great. "Adrienne Lecouvreur" was repeated again and again ; wherever the actress journeyed—and she journeyed far—she took the play with her. It was as *Adrienne Lecouvreur* she was last seen upon the stage, the feeble shadow of her former self, very faint and weary, coughing incessantly, a poor death-stricken woman ; this was at Charleston on the 17th December 1856. Of the many works devised for her—and the dramatists of

France laboured to find becoming occupation for her genius—"Adrienne Lecouvreur" only has retained its place in the theatre. It was translated into Italian for Madame Ristori; it was adapted to the English stage by Mr. Oxenford as "The Reigning Favourite," the heroine being personated now by Mrs. Sterling, and now by Miss Sedgwick. Of late Mdlle. Sarah Bernhardt has taken possession of the part. And now what is understood to be an American version of the play has been presented at the Court Theatre for the sake of Madame Modjeska, whose *Adrienne* has for some years past been held in the States to be one of the most perfect performances of the admired Polish actress.

From an English point of view "Adrienne Lecouvreur" is not a particularly interesting or attractive drama; and presented in five acts, as it is presented at the Court Theatre, it is often very tedious. It would have been better, I think, if the management had revived Mr. Oxenford's adaptation, which is, of course, very well written, is in three acts only, represses sundry of the minor incidents, and dispenses with much superfluous dialogue. The translation at the Court is poorly executed, with curious alternations of high-flown and vulgar diction; the characters say "thanks" to each other with quite a modern air, and the *Prince de Bouillon* talks of "kicking up a row." The long exposition of the manners and customs of the Théâtre Français greatly encumbers the play, and leaves the audience in a very apathetic state. English equivalents are not to be found for La Fontaine's fable and the tirade from *Phèdre*, with which the *Adriennes* of the French stage have been wont to charm and to excite their auditors. Many of the grand points and effects of the original thus fail to impress in a London theatre. It is of less moment

that the morality of the play is open to reproach; the dramatists had to deal with a profligate period, and they have been at pains to idealise their heroine, and to exhibit her in as engaging a light as possible. Even the tragedy of her death has been given a poetical complexion that is not strictly its due, if it be authentic that *Adrienne* was not poisoned by malice, but died because of the accidental administration of an over-dose of ipecacuanha. Her stage career began in 1717 and ended in 1730. She was much loved, or she had many lovers: the actor Legrand, Voltaire, Lord Peterborough, and Marshal Saxe, "sans compter," as a biographer puts it, "celui-ci qui fut père de sa première fille, sans parler de celui-là qui fut père de la seconde, car, si on cherchait bien, on trouverait, à ce qu'il paraît, beaucoup de descendants de l'illustre comédienne." In converting the actress into the heroine of a modern drama, the authors have certainly exhibited much ingenuity. No doubt they have strained probability somewhat, as when they require the spectators to believe that the *Princesse de Bouillon* would appoint a meeting with her lover, the *Comte de Saxe*, in the *petite maison* presented by her husband to his mistress, *Mademoiselle Duclos*, the *Prince* retaining possession of a key which admits him to the scene of the assignation at any moment. But then the interview in the dark which follows between the *Princesse* and *Adrienne*, rivals in love, neither being able to recognise or identify the other, is highly dramatic. And in the whole range of the drama there are few more moving or distressing scenes than that of the death of *Adrienne*, by means of the poisoned bouquet, in the last act.

Madame Modjeska's success as *Adrienne* is most unequivocal. Her performance is artistic and refined, ingenious, forcible, elaborate, and, in the final situation,

most affecting. I know of no actress who has been able so completely and curiously to combine intensity of dramatic expression with exceeding naturalness of manner. Of course, for stage purposes, her portrayal of nature is idealised and sublimated, her picturesqueness is arrived at by a consummate exercise of art; but she fairly succeeds in compelling her public to forget that she is acting, and to accept as genuine her simulations of emotion, excitement, and suffering. I have seen more pathetic players and more passionate; I have seen none more consistent and sustained in the representation of character, more varied in the graces and arts which invest stage portraiture with completeness. To special charms of aspect, presence, and manner, she adds admirable taste in dress; her costumes as *Adrienne* are exquisite in their arrangements of line, lustre, and colour. The audience were stirred by her performance to great manifestations of enthusiasm; she was called for and recalled, applauded to the echo, complimented with innumerable bouquets. Her triumph, I may note, is the more remarkable in that it is achieved in spite of very serious obstacles. She appears in an infirmly translated French play, which in its subject and treatment stands much removed from English sympathies, which scarcely addresses itself to English comprehension; and it is hard—I find it very hard—to forgive the lady not merely her foreign accent and pronunciation, but her habit of slurring her speeches, and rendering them indistinct if not inaudible, by reason of her excessive rapidity of utterance. It must be understood, indeed, that Madame Modjeska's efforts have to be accepted with these conditions and drawbacks, or denied altogether.' At present it seems that the public has no difficulty about the saving clauses and provisions which accompany the lady's representations.

Madame Modjeska is but poorly supported at the Court Theatre. English actors are seldom seen to such disadvantage as when they attempt to picture French life and manners of the last century. Miss Amy Roselle is ineffective as the *Princesse de Bouillon*, and Mr. Forbes Robertson as the *Comte de Saxe* does not impress. Skill to represent the grand airs and manners of the days of wig and sword and hair-powder seems lost to our stage. Mr. Beveridge's *Prince de Bouillon* lacks distinction, and Mr. Lin Rayne's *Abbé* is not to be tolerated upon any terms. Mr. Anson fails to understand the character of *Michonnet*, the *régisseur* of the Théâtre Français; this, Regnier's original character, was sustained upon the English stage in 1849 by "old Farren."

## CXLI.

## "THE FOOL'S REVENGE."

[Princess's Theatre.—January 1881.]

MR. TOM TAYLOR'S "The Fool's Revenge," first produced at Sadler's Wells in 1859, is a timid adaptation of "*Le Roi s'Amuse*." The English playwright proved himself ingenious in avoiding certain of the more dreadful incidents of the original, and in substituting for these several effective scenes of his own invention; moreover, he converted M. Hugo's rhymed Alexandrines into blank verse of respectable quality. Indeed, he was so painstaking about his task, that, having an adapter's views as to the constitution of originality, Mr. Taylor was convinced at last that he had produced an original work. Yet if deduction be made from "The Fool's Revenge" of all that belongs to "*Le Roi s'Amuse*," the residuum will not be found to be of particular value. Mr. Taylor preserved the life and honour of the heroine, provided her with a faithful lover, and, introducing a jealous Duchess and a poisoned cup, made away with the Italian Duke, who, in the English play, as in the opera of Verdi, fills the place assigned by the French dramatist to Francis I. Thus "The Fool's Revenge" terminates with stricter regard for the conventions of poetical justice than M. Hugo cared to be

hampered with. It is curious, indeed, how widely the adapter departed from the ground-plan of the original, while retaining so much of the superstructure. "Le sujet véritable du drama," explains M. Hugó, "c'est la malédiction de Monsieur de Saint-Vallier." This *malédiction* Mr. Taylor suppressed. *Bertuccio*, the English representative of *Triboulet*, who bears the name of *Rigoletto* on the operatic stage, is robbed of his daughter, and suffers terribly on her account; but there has been no foreshadowing of his doom in the story of *Saint-Vallier* and

4. The deformed jester does not mock the bereft nobleman, to provoke his curse and to undergo presently a like fate. "La malédiction du père de *Diane* s'accomplit sur le père de *Blanche*." Mr. Taylor deemed it more important to save the daughter of *Bertuccio*.

But if a weaker and more commonplace work than "Le Roi s'Amuse," nevertheless "The Fool's Revenge" has its powerful moments, its exciting situations. The adaptation was contrived, if I remember rightly, for Robson, an actor of peculiar genius, who does not seem to be very freshly remembered nowadays; but for some reason the first *Bertuccio* was Mr. Phelps, who obtained great and merited applause by the vigour and intensity of his performance of the character. It always seemed to me, however, that, in his earlier scenes, Mr. Phelps' jester was more vindictive and venomous of manner than was quite consistent with probability, or than the text demanded; for a court-fool, however disposed to malignancy of humour, must now and then have assumed an air of good-nature even if he had it not. Mr. Phelps' buffoon was apt to be too persistently scorpion-like—a combination of *Apemantus* and *Thersites* in his acrid churlishness and scurrility. In the later portions of the drama, as the declared father of *Fiordelisa*, the



actor was tender and pathetic, and displayed great passion in the crowning scenes, when the failure of *Bertuccio's* plot becomes clear to him, and its terrible recoil excites him to frenzy and desperation. I do not know that the part has been essayed by any other English actor. In America "The Fool's Revenge" has enjoyed great favour, I understand, because of Mr. Booth's performance of *Bertuccio*; and it is, of course, for the sake of Mr. Booth that the play has now been revived at the Princess's Theatre. Altogether, it may safely be judged that Mr. Booth's efforts in "The Fool's Revenge," will enhance his reputation in this country, if doubt may arise as to whether the character of *Bertuccio* is quite worthy of the genuine art, the exceeding labour and painstaking the actor expends upon it. For *Bertuccio* is a creature of melodrama, albeit he speaks blank verse; he is truer to stage effect than to nature. And the character, as I think, is more taxing than remunerative to its representative, who is called upon for incessant exertion, for continuous strain upon his histrionic resources, for violent contrasts of light and shade; to be one thing to his stage companions and another to the audience; to be at once odious and respectable; to seem to revel in the degradation of his position while claiming sympathy for the purity and exaltation of his sentiments. Mr. Booth certainly accomplishes all this, and succeeds in exciting his audience in an uncommon degree. He is able to enwrap himself, as it were, in the character of *Bertuccio*, to the complete concealment of his own identity. He lays stress upon the jester's uncomeliness of aspect, his misshapen limbs and distorted movements; and he is skilled in the gestures, the attitudes and gyrations—what may be called the stage business—of buffoonery. In his motley suit, with his jester's bells jingling about him, he

sinks curled up at the feet of his interlocutors, crouches as in dread of their buffets, dances quaintly around them, or stands stork-like on one leg, while significantly wielding his bauble as a weapon, now of offence now of defence. His every utterance gains point and accent from the appropriate glance and action accompanying it, his ever-varying expression, his restlessness of movement; while his noble voice, and his fine elocutionary system prove of signal advantage in the more declamatory scenes, as, for instance, in the narrative of *Bertuccio's* early life and suffering, or in his speech of rapt exultation, when his triumph seems at hand, the consummation of his revenge imminent. At the climax of the story the actor is fairly entitled to a certain liberty and violence of manner, bordering upon the extravagant; for moderation needs must be dispensed with when the fury of despair has to be depicted. No doubt Mr. Booth's passion departs from heroic bounds, descends to a familiar level, is grotesque and almost comic in certain of its manifestations, its colloquiality of tone, its homeliness of pose and gesture; yet I think the actor's desire to be real and true did not transgress artistic limits, and assuredly the effect of his performance upon his auditors was very great indeed. His agonising cries of despair rang through the house, and awoke extraordinary excitement. Mr. Booth's success, indeed, was most complete, if the play itself seemed to satisfy less than it did twenty years ago. The actor obtains better support in this than in the other plays produced on his account. The *Duchess* of Mrs. Vezin, the *Duke* of Mr. Redmund, the *Fiordelisa* of Miss Gerard, and the *Serafino* of Mr. Cartwright are all creditable performances.

## CXLII.

## "THE CUP."

[Lyceum Theatre.—January 1881.]

CONSIDERED as the offspring of a famous poet, "The Cup" is but of dwarfish and puny proportions: it must be quite the smallest tragedy in the language. Mr. Irving has supplied the work with the richest of stage decorations, but he has been unable to dissemble or cloak its inherent poverty. The setting is magnificent; the gem is minute, and not of the purest lustre. The Lyceum audience, it is true, welcomed the production of "The Cup" with a fervid display of enthusiasm; but beneath all the foam and surge of the complimentary and conventional rapture there rolled, as it seemed to me, a deep sea of disappointment. "The Cup," viewed apart from the scenic trappings and accessories with which the lavish manager has adorned it, the play as distinguished from the spectacle, proved to be bald, crude, uninteresting, and ineffective: a poetic sketch, a dramatic anecdote or study indiscreetly brought upon the stage, while, in truth, as little suited for theatrical performance as one of the so-called Sacred Dramas of Mrs. Hannah More, let us say, or one of the Imaginary Conversations of Walter Savage Landor. Plutarch's story of Camma, the Galatian widow, who married a second husband only to poison him,

in revenge for his murder of her first spouse, had been already arranged for the stage by French, German, and Italian dramatists. Madame Ristori was wont to obtain great applause by her personation of *Camma*, but not in London, I think ; for our Licensers of five-and-twenty years ago would probably have interdicted the play. However, concerning these matters we are not so tightly laced as we used to be : our morality, nowadays, is not worn as a strait-waistcoat, but, "like a lady's loose cloak, hangs about us," easily put off and on ; and Mr. Tennyson can have experienced no difficulty with the Examiner of Plays touching the production of "The Cup." To the earlier tragedies dealing with the subject Mr. Tennyson has probably not referred, otherwise "The Cup" might have manifested more expertness of workmanship. For, as he has demonstrated upon former occasions, the Laureate is not skilled as a playwright ; he has no real knowledge of the theatre, small sympathy with its exigencies. A play to him is little more than a collection of choice speeches : the meeting and the parting of various personages charged with the interchange of poetic sentiments exquisitely expressed. With some few lay figures in the background, there are but three characters in "The Cup"—*Camma*, the heroine ; *Sinnatus*, her first, and *Synorix*, her second husband. *Sinnatus* is slain at the close of the first act : not wilfully murdered, for he is stabbed in a sudden encounter with *Synorix*, whose own life was imperilled ; the offended husband, brandishing a sword, was rushing upon him ; forthwith *Synorix* plies the dagger chance has placed in his hand. An adroit dramatist, without being specially observant of classical prescriptions, would probably have packed into one scene the events contained in the first act of "The Cup." Mr. Tennyson, for the unfolding of this portion of his plot, requires the

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display, first of a landscape with distant view of the city of Galatia ; next of the interior of the house of *Sinnatus* ; and then of the landscape again, seen under the influence of early morning. Be it said that Mr. Telbin is thus enabled to display his art to perfection : a more admirable stage picture than his view of Galatia has never been exhibited. And here I may note occurs the superfluous incident of *Sinnatus's* noisy hunting-party, and the introduction of "real dogs" upon the stage. The second act, occupied with the death by poison both of *Camma* and *Synorix*, would be bare enough but for the efforts of the scene-painter, Mr. Hawes Craven,—whose interior of the Temple of Artemis is marvellously contrived,—and the groupings and processions, the burning of incense, the mysterious rites, the flickering of altar-fires and lamps, and the strewing of bridal flowers, arranged by the stage-manager, to say nothing of the musical accompaniments, the marches and hymns to Artemis, composed by Mr. Hamilton Clarke ; the catastrophe, the quaffing of the poisoned cup, and the deaths of the drinkers, being, so far as the poet is concerned, but unimpressively conducted.

The story is no doubt of a painful, and even rather revolting character ; and the dramatist who would found upon it an appeal to sympathy has a task of uncommon difficulty before him. *Camma* should win esteem by her devotion to *Sinnatus* ; yet *Sinnatus* is shown to be a poor sort of creature, obtuse, absorbed by the pleasures of the chase, disposed, it might even be, to hold his wife "something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse." *Synorix*, the villain of the story, is really its most interesting personage. He is at least consistent and intelligible ; he has one object in view, and he pursues it to the death. His passion for *Camma*, his resolve to possess her, claims respect because

of its force and absoluteness. He is a traitor to Galatia, no doubt; he is unscrupulous and libertine; but he is true to himself; he risks all for his love, and he almost triumphs; he falls at last unfairly, a victim to his faith in the woman he has made his wife and his queen. The poet has limned *Camma* far less firmly and distinctly; she is ascribed in the first instance no special attributes of grandeur, no great intellectual power, no supremacy of will, no strong political opinions, save that she is permitted a patriotic speech upon the question whether Galatia should rather fight or yield to Rome; she is the young, beautiful, sentimental, and rather doting wife of a weak and dull husband. The spectator is not—perhaps could not be—prepared for her change to the furious woman of the last scene, the savage Pagan priestess, intent upon a diabolical scheme of vengeance, eager to murder both *Synorix* and herself. Indeed, her plan has not even this limit; crime comes so easy to her, that she tenders her cup of poisoned wine to an inoffensive bystander, *Antonius*, a Roman general, who certainly has done her no personal injury. Happily, the general is a water-drinker; he puts from him the cup, and the murderess is so far discomfited. She calmly proceeds to poison her bridegroom, and watches him exultingly as he drains the fatal chalice. Is it surprising that modern spectators find it difficult to consider her conduct with much lenience?

"The Cup" is written, if not in the Laureate's happiest manner, yet with much of his wonted delicacy of fancy and elegance of diction. There are several fine declamatory passages, and here and there occur descriptions and images of singular beauty. It must be said, however, that Mr. Tennyson's Muse is apt to employ ambiguous phrases, to resort to refinements—I shrink from saying affectations—of expression, which render her utterances oftentimes

perplexing to the general ear. Fine thoughts appeared to be now and then too superfinely presented, too much involved in dainty subtleties of idiom, for immediate comprehension by average intelligences. It seems to me, in fact, that Mr. Tennyson's verses should at all times rather be read than listened to ; and read, of course, with abundant opportunity for lingering over and recurrence. Possibly the poet is too literate and fastidious for the theatre. If his theme had been more happily chosen, had possessed more of human interest, and appealed more directly to general sympathies, if his characters had shown a closer correspondence with nature, these defects might not have been so evident. But "The Cup" seemed sadly lacking in the frank, robust, clear speech of the elder dramatists. The players were in this respect never cordially and thoroughly *en rapport* with their audience, albeit, as I have said, the external compliments attendant upon first representations plentifully graced the occasion. As I judge, the tragedy failed to impress.

The representation left something to be desired. Mr. Terriss is able to accomplish little with the character of *Sinnatus* ; but the materials are slight, the poet having assigned *Sinnatus* but a limited measure of significance and dignity, while his career in the play is brought to a close suddenly and prematurely. Moreover, the actor is required to wear a costume so quaint of colour and device as to suggest connection with fairy extravaganza. As *Synorix* Mr. Irving, making needless parade, perhaps, of the villany of the character, and cumbered somewhat by the sustained efforts of declamation required of him, presents a most picturesque figure, and plays with excellent art, his death scene being especially well conceived and executed. Upon Miss Ellen Terry devolves the severest of duties. As the

*Camma* of the first act she is delightfully tender and sympathetic, dainty and spiritual; she wears her fluent classic draperies with exquisite address; her attitudes and movements are instinct with poetic and artistic grace. As the widowed *Camma*, frenzied, a Pythoness, vindictive, malignant, the actress is less successful; her powers are plainly overtaxed; her fitness for the character becomes questionable; she is deficient in physical force; she has not at command the necessary vehemence and abandonment. Her *Camma* breathing vengeance and dealing out death in the Temple of Artemis does not awe or greatly excite. There is genuine pathos, however, in her cries to *Sinnatus* as she expires, hoping to join him in the Blessed Isles—the "ever-shining shores beneath an ever-rising sun."



## CXLIII.

## THE MONEY SPINNER.

[St. James's Theatre.—January 1881.]

MR. PINERO, who, as a member of Mr. Irving's company, has lent subordinate aid to sundry of the performances at the Lyceum Theatre, has also from time to time manifested skill as a playwright. His little comedies of "Bygones," "Daisy's Escape," and "Hester's Mystery" are works of no great pretence, but they have all been deservedly commended for their freshness, animation, and ingenuity. The actor-author has thus been encouraged to venture more ambitiously, and a two-act play of his contriving, entitled "The Money-Spinner," and first produced at Manchester some two months ago, has now been promoted to the St. James's Theatre. Mr. Pinero invents his own plots and writes his own dialogue, while his practical acquaintance with the stage has enabled him so to shape and conduct his plays as to suit them to the recognised tastes and requirements of theatrical audiences. This last merit has, of course, its attendant defect; plays written by players are apt to resort to rather trite and obviously artificial means of entertaining, and "The Money-Spinner" is not free from this infirmity; it is here

and there too redolent of the stage-lamps. A more serious blemish arises from the nature of the story. The characters do not come upon the stage with what are technically known as "clean hands;" all, or nearly all, seemed to have dabbled in fraud or aided and abetted in the compounding of felony. The heroine cheats at cards; her father is a drunken blackleg; her sister, reproachable less for her morals than her manners, yet exhibits vulgarity of the most pronounced type. The hero is a clerk in a cotton factory who has embezzled money, while his father is something of a fraudulent bankrupt, and his most intimate friend is a disguised detective. Fortunately this corrupt assembly boasts a certain leaven of respectability because of the presence in its midst of a young Scotch nobleman, who is extremely foolish, but not absolutely immoral, save that he is very anxious to screen the criminals and to convert them into his dearest friends; he is even so unwise as to marry the heroine's vulgar sister; not that he loves her exactly, but because she presents some physical resemblance to the heroine, of whom he was once enamoured, but who rashly bestowed herself upon the embezzling clerk. These are not, perhaps, very promising personages to enlist in the service of comedy; but Mr. Pinero has employed them, I am bound to say, very cleverly, and has produced altogether a thoroughly effective work. "The Money-Spinner" in representation greatly pleased and interested the audience, something of course being due to the excellent support afforded by the St. James's company. Mr. Mackintosh particularly distinguished himself as the personator of the French detective, *Faubert*. Mr. Clayton played forcibly as the hero, who bears, by chance, the unlucky name of *Boycott*. As

the Scotch nobleman and the dishonest, but afterwards penitent, heroine, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal were all that could be wished ; while in the part of the veteran blackleg, *Baron Croodle*, Mr. Hare is admirably lively, eccentric, and droll.

CXLIV.

"OTHELLO."

[Princess's Theatre.—January 1881.]

MR. BOOTH'S *Othello* did not satisfy expectation. It is true that Mr. Booth's audience arrived at the theatre in so weather-beaten, not to say frost-bitten, a condition as to preclude fervid or enthusiastic views upon almost any subject; but after ample allowance has been made for adverse influence of this kind, the fact remains that the performance disappointed. Mr. Booth's *Othello* did not excite; it moved neither to terror nor to pity. Merits it displayed undoubtedly; yet these very merits were so urged and insisted upon as to assume sometimes the semblance of defects. Mr. Booth's art, as his *Othello* exhibits it, suffers seriously from over-elaboration and excess of anxiety; it is so studied as to appear to be without spontaneity: it is too deliberate; a sense of preparation and premeditation discounts, as it were, the actor's effects, and deprives them of all air of impulse; a love of emphasis leads to its injudicious distribution, until syllables gain prominence at the expense of sentences, and significance is sacrificed to excess of articulateness. A power of depicting passion Mr. Booth assuredly possesses, and when his fine voice is at its finest—it was not nearly at its

finest when he first played *Othello* at the Princess's—it can discourse most eloquent and emotional music; nevertheless, tones of pathos and of tenderness lie less certainly within its compass. It may be, too, that reverence for tradition has affected injuriously Mr. Booth's *Othello*. For the stage *Othello*, even though he comes to us from the other side of the Atlantic, has not yet obtained complete emancipation from the traditions, the points, it may even be said the tricks, of Edmund Kean.

In the earlier scenes Mr. Booth is rather graceful and supple than stately and dignified; his lowness of stature and slightness of figure perhaps prohibit majesty of port or pretensions of aspect. His flowing robes may be somewhat too fantastic and variegated, but he wears them adroitly; he affects no Eastern composure or passiveness of manner, but he is alert, vivacious, restless, indulging in much expressive if somewhat redundant gesticulation. He takes care to manifest *Othello's* love for *Desdemona*, his scorn for the oburgations of *Brabantio*; and delivers his oration to the senate with admirable elocutionary art, if with an insufficient undercurrent of ardour. He wisely avoids that hurry to greet *Desdemona* in the council-chamber affected by some *Othellos*: she is a witness in the case, and must give her evidence impartially, free from suspicion of collusion with the accused; and his hearty asseveration, "My life upon her faith!" brings the scene to a close happily enough. In the second act, and during later portions of the play, the example of Edmund Kean may, I think, be traced, with unfortunate results. The dismissal of *Cassio*, for instance, is treated as a very solemn occasion: *Mr. Booth's* tones, mien, and action become alike portentous; it is to him one of the most important passages in the tragedy. Hazlitt describes Kean's manner

at this point as "terrific, magnificent, prophetic." Yet the incident does not really need this prodigious sort of treatment. With regret, but as a matter of military duty, *Othello* makes, as he says, an example of *Cassio*, and reduces him to the ranks for brawling and drunkenness. But his offence is soon shown to be not so very grave after all; for, as *Emilia* relates at the beginning of the next act, *Othello* has protested he will take "the safest occasion by the front" to reinstate his officer. What need, therefore, of the terrific, the magnificent, or the prophetic, in the method of sentencing him? Kean, as I judge, was in haste to arrive at his "flashes of lightning;" his signal histrionic genius was greatly aided by startling use of his extraordinary physical force, and he was wont to precipitate the whirlwinds and eruptions of his passion. *Othello* is wrathful—there is the first hint of the vehemence of his nature—when he fails to discover how the "foul rout" has begun; but after *Iago's* explanation he is calm again, and he proceeds to the just punishment of the offender. In like manner, the *Othello* of the stage yields too suddenly to the temptations of *Iago*; the train is no sooner laid than it is fired and the mine exploded; the graduality of the villain's process is overlooked. Yet *Iago* himself is careful to point out that the "dangerous conceits" he distils into the mind of his victim resemble poisons—

" Which, at the first, are scarce found to distaste ;  
But, with a little, act upon the blood,  
Burn like the mines of sulphur."

It is not until his second interview with *Othello* that *Iago* describes him as "eaten up with passion." During their first converse *Othello* is uneasy, alarmed, distressed, greatly

perplexed ; then follows a pause ; frenzy, epilepsy, madness, murder, and despair arrive by and by. *Iago's* insinuations are subtly ordered. He hints objection to *Cassio's* acquaintance with *Desdemona*, to the employment of him as a confidential agent, implying that he is not honest ; then, by warning *Othello* against jealousy, intimates that he has the gravest reason to be jealous. It was, I think, at *Iago's* second utterance of the word "jealousy" that Mr. Booth's *Othello* took fire. The exclamation, "O misery !" he employed, it seemed to me, as a comment upon an abstract case submitted to him, which did not nearly concern him, however. But his first outburst of passion was not surpassed by the fury of the later and more desperate scenes. It may be objected, indeed, that the performance presented too sustained a monotone of rage, and that the actor insufficiently reserved his force for the crowning moments of the tragedy. He could but repeat his efforts, not transcend them ; and the interest of the representation seemed thus to sink somewhat when most it should have risen. Hazlitt's charge against Edmund Kean is applicable to Mr. Edwin Booth : he is too constantly on the rack, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance ; and speeches of pure pathos, thought, and feeling he treats too much as expressions of passion venting itself in violence of action, tone, and gesture. Moreover, Mr. Booth is apt to interpret overmuch : desirous that no word should lose its value, he seems to surcharge the text with meaning, to oppress it with superfluous comment of emphasis, action, and facial expression. Watching him, one longs sometimes for a simpler histrionic method, the completer subjection of the player to the poet. But this defect is not peculiar to Mr. Booth.

I should state that the performance, though unsatisfactory

when considered as a whole, had yet its valuable and interesting passages, and often evidenced much ingenuity of contrivance ; in the conduct of the last scene, for instance, the attack upon *Iago*, and the suicide of *Othello*. There was much noble declamation. The "Farewell" speech and the grand lines beginning, "Had it pleased Heaven to try me with affliction," were very finely delivered ; while, from Mr. Booth's exaltation of manner, the history of the handkerchief acquired a curious character of Oriental romanticism. The version of the tragedy employed by Mr. Booth seems to me no improvement upon the ordinary acting edition. The text is here and there restored, as in the case of *Othello's* speech, "Like to the Pontick sea ;" but there are important suppressions, among them great part of the first scene of the fourth act. The murder of *Roderigo* is represented ; but, strangely enough, the previous appearance of *Othello* upon the scene is dispensed with. And it is hard to account for the choice of the view of Cyprus, with its port and pier, and a background of tumbling sea, as the scene of the tempting of *Othello*, his jealousy and anguish. The same canvas had witnessed, but a little while before, the landing of *Othello* with his soldiers amid a crowd of acclaiming Cypriots.



## CXLV.

## "OTHELLO."

[Princess's Theatre.—February 1881.]

As *Iago*, Mr. Edwin Booth obtains far more favour than was accorded to his earlier Shakspearean assumptions in London, *Hamlet* and *Othello*. *Iago*, the critics have told us, may be played in two ways: either as a patent villain, whose wickedness is writ large upon his countenance, expressed strongly in his every glance and scowl, posture and gesture; or as a gay light-hearted monster, careless, cordial, comfortable—the *Iago* indeed, of Edmund Kean, according to Hazlitt's account of his performance. But I do not know that Mr. Booth's *Iago* can be so distinctly classed and dismissed. Of course the actor does not depict the character in the glaring colours and with the ponderous strokes affected upon our stage in times past; but neither does he convert *Iago* into "a pattern of comic gaiety and good-humour." He is very vivacious and voluble; he wears an Italian look, and indulges in an Italian ease and variety, significance and profuseness of gesticulation; he is very quick of movement, light and lithe of figure, with yet a certain soldierly trimness and smartness of presence; the only advertisement of his iniquitous disposition is to be read, perhaps, in his Mephistophelean crimson-peaked hat

and curling feather. There is little gaiety in his manner, however ; he laughs and jests, but in a mocking, malignant spirit, with a sub-current of bitterness and venom. It was fairly charged against Mr. Fechter's *Iago* that at intervals he seemed to borrow something too much of the levity of *Figaro*. Mr. Booth's performance is not open to any such reproach. His *Iago* passes as "a lively bottle-companion," justifies in some degree his designation of "honest," because of his outspoken air, his apparent preference for rudeness of speech, his rough jests and coarse sallies, his cynical frankness, that can upon occasion descend to absolute brutality ; but even his sprightlier moods are attended by grim shadows or may be said to cast sinister reflections. The performance is altogether remarkable for its consistency, its force, its finish and subtlety. I can remember no *Iago* at once so natural and plausible, so intellectual and so terrible. Mr. Booth distinguishes finely between *Iago's* manner when he is engaged in his familiar converse with *Roderigo* and when he stands in the presence of *Othello*. With his poor dupe the "silly gentleman," *Iago* does not need much artifice, cares little about concealing his own vileness of nature ; he is abrupt enough in his cruel gibes and calumnies, soils and degrades every subject he touches upon ; but more warily, with a pretended sense of reserve and refinement, he proceeds to ensnare and destroy his nobler victim. There is something convincing about the natural air of reluctance and hesitation with which he first directs suspicion towards *Desdemona* ; he seems anxious to defend her while the more he is accusing her. In like manner in an earlier scene, affecting to exculpate *Cassio*, he had with greater completeness secured his disgrace. Mr. Booth's *Iago* pervades the tragedy like an incarnation of the Evil Principle. He is detestable throughout, and yet most inter-

esting ; he is busily maleficent, steps lightly, half willingly, half urged by circumstance, from crime to crime, the master-mind of the story, with the other characters but as puppets in his hand, moving only when he jerks their strings. Mr. Booth insists upon *Iago's* hatred of the *Moor*, the while he dwells little upon the alleged reason for that hatred. *Iago's* jealousy is offered but as a faint excuse for his sins, hardly worthy of serious consideration. *Emilia* has become contemptible and odious to him. Can he really credit that *Othello* and *Cassio* both have "worn his nightcap," as he grossly intimates? Or does he say so merely by way of salving a conscience that has usually dispensed with "flattering unction" of that kind?

Mr. Booth delivers his soliloquies admirably, and the character he represents is much developed by means of soliloquy. For the most part, he avoids the error, to which *Iagos* are prone, of addressing the audience, taking them into confidence too directly. Only once, I think, did I detect him in that stage trick, which even *Mr. Puff* deprecated, of "springing off with a glance at the pit." Mr. Booth, however, suffers much from the feebleness of his playfellows. Mr. Forrester, a painstaking and conscientious performer no doubt, has obtained much applause for an artistic forbearance which seems really the result of a natural tameness and apathy of constitution. As *Othello*, gorgeous in gold lace and crimson-cotton velvet as an old-fashioned pulpit, he is ludicrously incapable. He has no passion at command, he seems not susceptible of excitement even ; he can only depict the frenzy of *Othello* by a mechanical swaying of the arms and by clamorous employment of a rather flat-toned voice. *Iago's* poisonous insinuations might as well have been poured into the ears of a carved figure on a ship's prow, or addressed to a tavern

signboard of the Saracen's Head. Mr. Booth appeared to be labouring to lay and light a train of gunpowder which all his efforts could only induce to fizz, never to flame. Miss Milton is a very poor *Desdemona*. There is some promise, however, about Mr. Redmund's *Cassio*, while I need hardly say that Mr. Ryder and Mrs. Vezin are adequate representatives of *Brabantio* and *Emilia*. The stage arrangements have now been amended: a garden scene has been substituted for that view of the port of Cyprus which, as I noted, did duty in the third and fourth acts of the tragedy when Mr. Booth appeared as *Othello*.

## CXLVI.

## "THE COLONEL."

[Prince of Wales's Theatre.—February 1881.]

THE comedy of "*Le Mari à la Campagne*," by M. Bayard, has long been known to our stage as "*The Serious Family*;" it seemed to be a French version of Murphy's "*Way to Keep Him*," which, in its turn, I think, owned a foreign original. Mr. Burnand has now taken the familiar work in hand; and freely exercising his own invention, humour, and ingenuity, has produced at the Prince of Wales's Theatre one of the most entertaining of modern plays. "*The Colonel*," as it is called, deals in caricature: its predecessors did no less. But whereas they satirised religious intolerance and excess of Puritanism, Mr. Burnand has chosen for his theme that air of æsthetic intensity, those artistic affectations, which are classed among the fashionable foibles of the time. The topic has the great merit of being entirely new to the stage. The dramatist would deride the devotees of the dado and the frieze; the worshippers of sage-green hues, of blue-and-white china, of draggle-tailed skirts of neutral tint; the amateurs who find the sublime and the beautiful, the objects of their adoration, in such simple things as the sunflower, the daffodil, the lily, the dandelion, and the peacock's feather. No doubt the satire is rather broad than

subtle, and has recourse occasionally to exceeding exaggeration ; but it is not without its leaven of wholesomeness : it is founded upon truth, and assuredly, exhibited upon the stage, it greatly enlivens and amuses. Mr. Burnand has provided a sufficiency of smart and witty dialogue, resting now and then upon an old joke, as though to recover breath for a new flight ; and the sallies of the dramatist are glibly delivered by the players. As the American Colonel, who figured as an Irish captain in the old times, when the late James Wallack played in "The Serious Family" upon the stage of the Haymarket Theatre, Mr. Coghlan particularly distinguishes himself. His acting is altogether remarkable for its ease and self-possession, natural humour and spirit. Other members of the company are also seen to advantage. Miss Amy Roselle is graceful and vivacious as *Mrs. Blyth*, the sprightly widow, who entertains the hen-pecked husband, and afterwards finds a second mate for herself in the American Colonel ; while as *Lady Tomkins*, the alderman's relict, who has abandoned herself to æsthetic excesses, Mrs. Leigh Murray is highly amusing. As *Olive*, the young wife, Miss Myra Holme demonstrates great professional advance. Mr. Herbert appears as the erring husband ; and Mr. Fernandez plays with force, if with some lack of unction, the part of the impostor, *Lambert Streyke*. The success of the representation was never a moment in question. A long course of prosperity is probably in store for "The Colonel."

## CXLVII.

## "KING LEAR."

[Princess's Theatre.—February 1881.]

MR. BOOTH'S success as *Lear* has been almost unqualified. The performance is remarkable for its elaboration, refinement, and subtlety; for its force, passion, and tenderness; and the expression of tenderness, it may be noted, has sometimes seemed unduly absent from the actor's impersonations. But Mr. Booth's voice has suffered, either from the influence of the weather or from the stress of his nightly exertions; the symptoms of over-fatigue are too evident; his grand tones do not always come when he calls for them, his declamation has lost resonance, and his special gifts as an elocutionist prove to him of much less avail than usual. Mr. Booth has thus been unable to render full justice to himself and his intentions. He has powerfully affected his audience, however, by the picturesque, the artistic symmetry and consistency, the absolute abandonment of his representation of the character. There have been more dignified *Lears*, perhaps, although *Lear's* dignity is less an attribute of the man than of his position; but few actors can have rendered at once so forcibly, and yet with such minute finish,—due regard being had, of course, to the requirements of his-

trionic effect,—the physical and mental infirmities of *Lear*, his senile peevishness and peremptoriness, his ungovernable wrath, his vengeful frenzy, his terrible despair, and most pathetic death. In the whole range of tragedy there is nothing more pitiful than this scene of this death of *Lear*, from exhaustion of nature, from excess of suffering and of sorrow, with the body of his murdered *Cordelia* clasped in his arms. Mr. Booth treats this portion of the play with admirable delicacy and feeling. Altogether it cannot be doubted that his *Lear* has claims to be accounted as the finest of his Shakspearian performances. And this, I believe, is the judgment upon the subject of the critics, his compatriots.

"King Lear" has not been seen upon our stage for some years, and probably many are now making their first acquaintance with the work as an acting play. It was Macready who first rescued the original text from the state of degradation and mutilation to which Nahum Tate had reduced it; the wretched acting version of 1681 had, indeed, been adopted in turns by all the great actors, from Betterton, Barton Booth, Quin, Garrick, and Barry, down to John Kemble and Edmund Kean inclusive. Macready's example was followed by Mr. Phelps and Mr. Charles Kean, and of course the tragedy is now presented in its integrity, with such suppressions only as seem dictated by the exigencies of performance and by modern taste. It is difficult to believe that the dreadful scene of the plucking out of *Gloster's* eyes could ever have been exhibited on the stage at any time; the barbarous episode is more worthy of Webster than of Shakspeare. "King Lear" has been claimed by some writers as the poet's greatest work, "for its diversity and contrast of character, for its combining the storm of Nature with the passions of man." In the theatre



however, "King Lear" is, perhaps, the least popular of the great tragedies. Interest can hardly be given in performance to the troubles of *Gloster* and his sons—the weak reflection, as it were, of *Lear's* sufferings at the hands of his daughters; nor do the villainies of *Edmund* and the adulterous loves of *Goneril* and *Regan* impress very deeply. These deficiencies may be due in a measure, however, to imperfect representation; and few dramatic companies can ever have been strong enough to give adequate interpretation to the many characters of importance that take part in "King Lear." Junius Brutus Booth, the father of Mr. Edwin Booth, was fortunate when, playing *Lear* at Covent Garden in 1820, he obtained the support of Macready as *Edmund* and of Charles Kemble as *Edgar*. Now, at the Princess's, Mr. Edwin Booth has to be content with very feeble coadjutors. But the days of strong casts are over, especially in relation to what is known as the "legitimate drama." Our younger players have been afforded few opportunities of appearing in Shakspeare; and this fact has to be taken into account when the rawness and poverty of the representation at the Princess's are considered. The veteran Mr. Ryder, whose acting is invariably distinguished by certain sterling qualities, who was Macready's *Gloster* in 1845, and Charles Kean's *Edgar* in 1858, now appears creditably as Mr. Booth's *Kent*; and there is something to be said for Mr. Charles's performance of the *Fool*, a part that has often been assigned to an actress. Otherwise the players at the Princess's engaged in the representation of "King Lear" do not invite comment of a favourable sort.

CXLVIII.

"ROMEO AND JULIET."

[Court Theatre.—March 1881.]

"ROMEO AND JULIET" has been carefully reproduced with new and tasteful scenery, dresses, and decorations, in order that Madame Modjeska, for the first time in London, might appear as the heroine of the tragedy. The ambition which has prompted the actress to this essay is intelligible, and even creditable, enough ; but the risk of disaster was very great ; and it must be said at once that Madame Modjeska's *Juliet* failed to satisfy those who did not attend the theatre well provided with ready-made raptures, and predetermined to approve and applaud in any case. To the foreign player, the Shakspearian drama is, in almost every instance, a sealed book. The personation of *Juliet* is a task lying beyond the limits of Madame Modjeska's means ; in the whole poetic repertory, she could scarcely have lighted upon a character less suited to her physique, temperament, and histrionic method. Of course it is not to be expected that the *Juliet* of the stage can be as youthful as the *Juliet* of the poet : "Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen ;" but there is a maturity of manner that is almost as disadvantageous to the interpreter of *Juliet* as maturity of aspect. Madame Modjeska's

art does not enable her to represent artlessness, is too sophistical to depict simplicity; she cannot conceal the processes of preparation, elaboration, and effort upon which her histrionic portraitures depend; she is a conventional and artificial actress, gifted, graceful, and accomplished, well qualified to present the heroines of modern drama, able at times to display vehemence of a special kind, but absolutely incompetent to cope with the heroines of Shakespeare. These, it may be said, are as creatures of another and a nobler world, far removed from the confines of her dramatic experience. As *Juliet* her airs of ingenuousness become almost grimaces, her smiles degenerate into smirks; she would render the juvenility of the character by crossing the stage now and again with a certain skipping, ambling, skittish gait; she cannot reconcile the apparent inconsistency of *Juliet's* intensity of passion and innateness of purity. In her hands *Juliet's* love for *Romeo* declines into an intrigue; it is attended by so much calmness and calculation, it is so completely made a matter of deliberation and self-consciousness. Of the wild transport of sudden love, the intoxication of a first passion, no suggestions are forthcoming. The *Juliet* of the Court Theatre is a clever woman of the world, a drawing-room ornament, skilled in the arts of dress and deportment, whose love is leavened by worldly wisdom, who shrinks from any excess of the "purple light" lest it should be found unbecoming to her complexion, whose devotion to *Romeo* does not exclude regard for herself, who pertains much more to the Boulevards than to the bard of Avon. In fine, Madame Modjeska's *Juliet* lacks youth and truth, nature, freshness, passion, and poetry.

Upon the lady's nationality and foreign accent it is now, perhaps, needless to dwell; but of course in a tragedy of

Shakspeare's these are disadvantages of an insuperable kind. No doubt the fact that Madame Modjeska is required to speak a tongue that is strange to her robs *Juliet's* utterances of much of their spontaneity and impulsiveness, imposes a superfluous circumspection and cautiousness of manner; many of the more fervid speeches thus assuming the character of quiet and collected recitations. The actress can only impart warmth to them by hurrying them into unintelligibility, and reducing passages of the finest poetry in the language to the rudest prose, to a mere pulp, so to speak, of wrong emphasis, false accent, and mispronunciation. At times, indeed, it seemed questionable whether Madame Modjeska herself understood the speeches she failed so completely to render comprehensible to her audience. Of applause, it is only fair to say, there was an adequate supply, if of genuine enthusiasm there was little evidence. But, to my thinking, the *Juliet* of the popular Polish actress is altogether an inferior and unsatisfactory performance. Mr. Forbes Robertson proved himself a crude but zealous *Romeo*. Mr. Wilson Barrett, an adroit elocutionist, well versed in all the traditions of the part, won much favour by his spirited representation of *Mercutio*.

## CXLVIII.

## THE "HAMLET" OF 1603.

[St. George's Hall.—April 1881.]

THE quarto "Hamlet" of 1603, of which a copy was accidentally discovered sixty years since in Sir Thomas Hanmer's library at Barton, has been usually accounted a piratical, imperfect, stunted, botched, and corrupt edition of the tragedy: curious and interesting to antiquaries and Shakspearian students, but to the general public valueless enough. Certain sages or wiseacres, however, encouraged by sundry supersubtle German commentators, have made this wretched abortion of a book almost an object of adoration. They conceive it to be the poet's first draft of his play, and further to be prized because it is, as they maintain, more coherent, compact, intelligible, and dramatically effective than the later and lengthier editions. The world has been at fault in admiring, during so many years, the "Hamlet" of 3891 lines; it should accord its preference to the "Hamlet" of 2143 lines. Shakspeare injured his work by augmenting it; his second thoughts were not so good as his first; his additions should be cancelled; and we should return to the first text, its poverty and clumsiness, its execrable blank verse, its garbled lines and general slovenliness and debility notwithstanding! These are the arguments

of the advocates of the early "Hamlet," who further specially insist upon the fact that certain sentences of importance, as they allege—making clearer, for instance, the innocence of *Queen Gertrude*, and redeeming, in part, the character of *Laertes*—find a place only in the edition of 1603. The whole subject cannot, of course, be conveniently discussed here. I must be content with stating once more, that without doubt Shakspeare, after his manner, founded his "Hamlet" upon an older and ruder play dealing with the same story, not now extant, which had certainly been acted before 1590; and that the edition of 1603, being surreptitiously concocted of shorthand notes taken during performance, with the assistance of certain of the players' parts imperfectly copied, also contained some few passages of the primitive original tragedy, which Shakspeare did not think it necessary to include in his play, or, having once included, afterwards discarded. The majority of readers will surely find it impossible to believe that the author of "Romeo and Juliet" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," plays written probably about 1590, could some twelve years later have been guilty of perpetrating, even as a "first draft," so unscholarly, awkward, and even uncouth, a work as the "Hamlet" of 1603.

Nevertheless, this early and addled edition of "Hamlet" has been subjected to the test of stage representation. A company of ladies and gentlemen have taken pains to commit to memory the muddled and mangled text, and have attempted to personate the characters in the tragedy. It would be invidious to dwell upon their efforts. The exhibition was necessarily of a very incomplete kind: it was denied scenery and musical accompaniment; and probably interfered with nobody's convictions or opinions upon the subject. The worshippers of the corrupt play

will no doubt continue to worship it, nor indeed should their faith be changed because of the weakness of the interpretation ventured by the amateurs. The attitude of the general audience was one of apathy tinctured by a disposition to deride. Some derived amusement from the appearance of their old friend *Polonius* with the new name of *Corambis*, from hearing *Laertes* called *Leartes*, and from finding the spelling of *Ophelia* changed to *Ofelia*; considerable stir attending the entry upon the stage of *Fortenbrasse*, a character usually omitted from ordinary acting editions of the tragedy. But to many the performance was very wearisome and depressing; while a strong feeling prevailed that, upon the whole, the experiment was of an absurd and reprehensible sort, involving, as it did necessarily, some degradation of the poet in whose honour it purported to be undertaken.

CXLIX.

"OTHELLO."

[Lyceum Theatre.—May 1881.]

THE "special performance" of "Othello" with Mr. Booth as the hero of the tragedy, Mr. Irving as *Iago*, and Miss Ellen Terry as *Desdemona*, fluttered playgoing society very considerably. Altogether the experiment succeeded perfectly; enthusiastic approval of all concerned was the order of the night; the efforts of the players were rewarded with unlimited applause. Of Mr. Booth's *Othello* I had occasion to write some few weeks since, when he assumed the character at the Princess's Theatre, being supported rather inefficiently. Of course he is seen to more advantage at the Lyceum: Mr. Irving is both a heedful and a liberal manager, and does not spare pains or money in his resolve to secure the general completeness of the representations upon his stage. But Mr. Booth's *Othello* is not to be classed among his best efforts. It is an intelligent, scholarly, conscientious, zealous impersonation, with here and there certain very fine moments; but it fails to convince or to satisfy wholly. It is laboured, overcharged with details, it moves on but tardily; a desire for excess of finish has involved a sacrifice of breadth and force; or the actor's habitual pausings, his deliberateness of method, are to be



explained by the necessity he is under of husbanding and economising his means and rallying his strength. For the performance of *Othello* is quite as much a physical as an intellectual question. Shakspeare's *Moor* needs to be gifted with an extraordinary constitution, lungs that will not weary, and tones that cannot flatten, not to mention peculiar qualifications of aspect and mien. The tragedy has been rarely played of late years, or has been played under inconvenient conditions : a thoroughly competent representative of *Othello* being absent from the scene. It may be asked, indeed, whether, since the times of Edmund Kean, a generally accepted *Othello* has been forthcoming? With Macready's *Othello* great fault was found ; Gustavus Brooke was rather an actor with a grand voice than a grand actor ; the efforts of Charles Kean, Phelps, and Fechter in the part are hardly worth considering ; while to Signor Salvini's performance the fatal objection has to be made that he appeared in a foreign translation of the play, and spoke a language which probably Shakspeare himself did not understand. And a further difficulty in the way of representing "*Othello*" has arisen from the modern demand for what is known as naturalness of manner upon the stage. The players are required to be easy, colloquial, and familiar, even to the verge of vulgarity : *Polonius's* counsels to the contrary notwithstanding. The ear of our playgoers is unaccustomed to oratory ; the stage of to-day knows little of the torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of tragic passion. Now "*Othello*" is hardly to be played as, for instance, a comedy by the late Mr. Robertson is treated upon the stage. The *Moor's* utterances cannot be reduced to a conversational level. He is grandiloquent of speech, as he is stately of bearing. He must declaim, he cannot simply talk ; and when his moments of frenzy arrive, when he is required to

exclaim, "Whip me, ye devils!" "Roast me in sulphur!" and so on, I think his listeners must prepare to hear from him something very like ranting. *Othello* is fairly mad at last: should he not rave? I have little doubt that Edmund Kean's *Othello* raved and ranted very freely indeed. In fine, the poetic drama of the past can only be revived upon the understanding that the actors are permitted a certain heroic or exalted manner, both of bearing and locution, which would clearly be unsuited to a play of modern date. In Shakspeare's tragedies, as in classical statuary, humanity is sublimated; the modern drama does not work in marble, but rather in terra-cotta, in clay, or even putty: it employs very inferior materials.

Mr. Irving's exertions as *Iago* were very favourably received by the audience; his success, indeed, was quite beyond question. And yet, it seems to me, that in some respects his manner of performance will bear revision. Something too much I found of the strut and swagger, the attitudinising of melodrama, with a confirmed restlessness of deportment that was certainly disturbing to the spectators. As Verges would be talking, so Mr. Irving's *Iago* would be doing and moving. He could not—at any rate he did not—stand still for a moment; his hands were ever busy, now with this "property," now with that. Of course these are minor defects, which the actor is very likely to amend in his future performances. Nor need much stress be laid upon the eccentricity which has marked his choice of dress. So far as I know, there is no warrant discoverable for attiring *Iago* as something between a Spanish bull-fighter and an Italian bandit. These objections admitted, Mr. Irving is to be heartily congratulated: his *Iago* is one of his happiest impersonations; vigorous, subtle, ingenious, individual, an altogether impressive histrionic achievement.

By and by his *Iago* may be accounted as his most complete Shakspearian assumption.

As *Desdemona*, Miss Ellen Terry was very charming of aspect, as, indeed, she never fails to be: she was, moreover, graceful, tender, and pathetic. But she suffered, I think, from the nervousness of the occasion, and seemed sometimes less completely absorbed in the character she personated than she is usually. And she should be cautioned against permitting her *Desdemona*, even in her moments of severest suffering, to fling herself upon the bosom of *Iago*, and to accept the consolation of his embraces and caresses. The wives of commanding officers are not, or should not be, wont thus to accept comfort at the hands of subalterns; for it must be remembered that *Iago* is only an ensign, and but twenty-eight years old, as he himself announces. Mr. Terriss I class among the best representatives of *Cassio* I have ever known; and it is only right to note how carefully and cleverly certain of the minor characters were sustained: *Roderigo* by Mr. Pinero; the *Duke* by Mr. Beaumont; and *Ludovico* by Mr. Hudson.

CL.

"JUANA."

[Court Theatre.—May 1881.]

MR. WILLS'S new four-act play of "*Juana*" is a work of an old-fashioned sort, and may fairly be classed with such productions as Lord Beaconsfield's "*Alarcos*" or the tragedies of "*Monk*" Lewis. Nothing so doleful or so dreadful as "*Juana*" has been seen upon the stage for many years. Mr. Wills has laboured to accumulate horrors upon horror's head. The story might be borrowed from Mrs. Radcliffe, it deals so largely in the mysterious, the romantic, and the criminal. There is a want of nature about the characters, while the incidents are remarkable both for their incoherence and their improbability. *Juana* is the child of a murdered father, and the circumstances of his death have rendered her liable to attacks of insanity. She becomes the wife of a foppish nobleman, *Don Carlos de Narcisso*, who plays her false; her dearest friend, *Clara Perez*, a lady of unvirtuous character and the vaguest social position, being his partner in sin. *Juana's* disappointment and distress at the discovery of this perfidy induce a fit of mental aberration, and she promptly murders her husband. The crime is committed in the presence of a Franciscan friar, who has long loved *Juana* in secret. That her life

may not be forfeit, the friar protests that she is innocent, and avows himself the assassin of *Don Carlos*. A scene follows in which the corpse of the murdered man is borne in upon a bier, and the ordeal by touch is exhibited: all suspected of the homicide are compelled to approach and lay hands upon the fatal wound. The friar, to obtain his own conviction as a murderer, secretly stabs himself in the hand, and, having touched the body, displays his bleeding fingers to the spectators. He is sentenced to be buried alive—bricked up in the wall of the crypt of his monastery. From this fearful doom, however, he is spared by the timely return to reason of *Juana*, and by her last dying speech and confession that the guilt was really hers. These sombre and calamitous events are supposed to occur in the neighbourhood of Toledo about the year 1496. Costumes and scenery of great artistic beauty embellish the drama, and some attempt has been made to relieve its graver and ghastlier incidents by the introduction of comic characters: a malapert page, a coquettish waiting-woman, and a gluttonous monk of the Friar Tuck order. It struck me, however, that the lighter passages, although in themselves unobjectionable enough and pleasantly intended, had the effect of intensifying the general gloom and rendering the shocking nature of the story still more shocking; they were as much out of place, indeed, as conundrums and comic songs would be at a funeral. While the murder of the husband and the madness of the wife were still fresh events, attempts to provoke laughter seemed both irritating and insulting to the audience.

Mr. Wills has manifested but inferior art in the construction of his tragedy, and has overburdened it with words. Such interest as the story possesses is slow to reveal itself, and the earlier scenes suffer from the absence of action

and animation. Laudably anxious to impart something of literary value to his work, Mr. Wills has supplied an excess of artificial language and conventional blank verse. Although scarcely to be ranked as a poet, he has much quasi-poetic diction at command, and a desire to preserve a certain loftiness of locution has betrayed him at times into diffuseness and verbosity. If so dismal and disagreeable a play as "Juana" is to secure popularity, it must be at the sacrifice of many speeches and much dialogue, upon which it may be Mr. Wills has expended considerable pains. But "Juana" is only to be commended to those prepared to accept "funeral baked meats" as furnishing forth an appetising sort of dramatic repast.

Madame Modjeska has but a limited command of pathetic expression, or the tragedy, from its nature, makes little appeal to sympathy and sensibility. The actress, however, is very graceful and accomplished, and plays *Juana* with excellent art. The scenes of hysteria and lunacy which precede and follow the murder of *Don Carlos* are rendered with exceptional power and abandonment, winning from the audience enthusiastic applause. In other portions of the play Madame Modjeska seemed rather trammelled by the long speeches Mr. Wills has required her to deliver; and the exhibition of insanity in the third act was certainly too protracted both for artist and audience: the result was monotony and wearisomeness. Mr. Forbes Robertson proved himself a satisfactory representative of *Don Carlos*, murdered in the second act; and Mr. Wilson Barrett, by means of his dignity of bearing and adroit elocution, lent significance and value to the arduous and ungrateful character of the amorous Franciscan, *Friar John*. The minor parts were well and carefully sustained.

## CLI.

## "OTHELLO."

[Lyceum Theatre.—May 1881.]

AFTER three performances of "Othello," with Mr. Booth as the *Moor* and Mr. Irving as *Iago*, the cast has been changed or reversed, without, however, much abatement of public interest or curiosity in the matter. Mr. Booth has appeared as *Iago* and Mr. Irving as *Othello*. Of Mr. Booth's *Iago* I had occasion to write admiringly when he assumed the character at the Princess's Theatre some weeks since; his *Iago*, indeed, was then generally pronounced to be his most successful Shakspearian essay; and assuredly the actor gains by the superior conditions under which he performs at the Lyceum: he is supported by skilled players, and the stage equipments are most complete. Very hearty applause rewarded his exertions; again and again he was summoned before the curtain to receive the congratulations of his audience. As *Othello*, Mr. Irving has not, I think, been seen in London since the year 1876, when his impersonation obtained only a qualified sort of success. For he seemed at that time to have but an incomplete control over his resources, was often carried away by his own vehemence, was at times tempted to tear his passion to tatters, to very rags, and

lapsed into curious excesses of manner and speech. In the interval, however, Mr. Irving has become a practised interpreter of Shakspeare; he is now a far more disciplined performer than he was five years ago; his art has been tempered and chastened; he is able to concentrate his forces, and to endow his efforts with a completer sense of climax. That his *Othello* is wholly satisfying I do not pretend to say; but certainly his performance exhibits fewer defects, is altogether more sustained and even than once it was. His chief success was obtained in the earlier scenes, when, if he betrayed a disposition too frequently to "take the stage," as the technical term has it, and paced and promenaded about over-much, as though he liked to hear the rustling behind him of his gorgeous silken robes, he was yet impressive, self-contained, and stately. His love for *Desdemona* struck me as rather sentimentally expressed, his uxoriousness was of a very pronounced sort: in a very public manner, heedless of the opinions and the presence of bystanders, he lavished the most rapturous and doting of embraces and caresses upon his young bride, hurried to meet her ere she entered the council-chamber—as though she were a dangerous witness against him, and he desired to school her as to the evidence she should give the court—and afterwards held her veil for her with rather an effeminate air of affection and obsequiousness the while she delivered her first speech to her father. But he declaimed well, addressed the senate with excellent art, bore with dignity the charges and the wrath of *Brabantio*, and afterwards acquitted himself with distinction in the scene of *Cassio's* brawling and degradation at Cyprus. Nor could fault fairly be found with his manner of listening to the first insinuations and temptations of *Iago*. He was careful to avoid that eagerness to suspect the fidelity of



*Desdemona*, to which the tragedians of the past were prone ; he finely exhibited *Othello's* reluctance to doubt, his struggles with his own misgivings and alarms. In later passages of the play, I missed the poetic grandeur and profundity of *Othello's* passion, his extremity of perplexity, his leonine fury, his demoniac frenzy, his exquisite pathos and dreadful despair : the outward forms, modes, and shows of grief, anguish, and abandonment were present, but something of the terrible inward and mental suffering seemed but imperfectly suggested. At times, too, in his anxiety to avoid the inarticulateness of rant, the actor fell into the opposite error of drawling, adopted an artificial system of speech, and doled out his words with a sort of sepulchral monotony of effect, as though he were striving to imitate a pulpit manner of the worst kind. But throughout he played intelligently, anxiously, artistically, with indeed the utmost desire to spare himself in no way, to render every justice he possibly could to the part he had undertaken ; and his exertions were rewarded, as they deserved to be, by cordial and prolonged applause. His method of costume, it may be noted, has undergone revision. He now appears arrayed in much magnificence of a barbaric sort : jewels sparkle in his turban and depend from his ears, strings of pearls circle his dusky throat, he is abundantly possessed of gold and silver ornaments, and his richly-brocaded robes fall about him in the most lustrous and ample folds. He is blacker of face than the *Othello* of the stage has ventured to be since the times of Macready, and altogether he presents as superb an appearance as an Eastern king pictured by Paolo Veronese. It may be, indeed, that the actor has laid too much stress both upon the luxury and gorgeousness, as upon the Orientalism, of his apparel. As a naturalised Venetian in the employment of the State, it may be urged that

*Othello* was more likely to assume the dress of his adopted country, to appear clothed as a civilised European of the sixteenth century.

The *Desdemona* of Miss Ellen Terry is now one of her most charming performances; very sympathetic, graceful, and picturesque. And I note that when Mr. Booth is her *Iago*, Miss Terry's *Desdemona* does not permit herself to fall weeping upon his bosom or to find consolation in his soothing endearments.

## CLII.

## "YOUTH."

[Drury Lane Theatre.—August 1881.]

THE new "sensational and domestic" drama of "Youth," which Messrs. Paul Meritt and Augustus Harris have contrived for Drury Lane Theatre, hardly equals the famous play of "The World," supplied a year ago by the same authors to the same establishment. "Youth" has been liberally and even luxuriously equipped for representation; there are scenic effects in abundance; altogether much ingenuity has been expended, strenuous efforts made to illude and startle the spectators. Yet it must be said that the result was rather disappointing: "Youth" certainly seemed deficient in freshness, and upon the whole, somewhat dull. The new play resembles one of those modern new houses which are made of old bricks; if the shape boasts any novelty, the materials are trite and familiar enough. Reminiscences of Mr. Boucicault's "Formosa" haunt the earlier scenes of "Youth;" and by and by there seems to have been borrowing from the military spectacles of Astley's Amphitheatre, from the melodramas of crime and prison life of Mr. Watts Phillips and Mr. Charles Reade—"Not Guilty" and "It is Never too Late to Mend." Even the great scene in "Youth," of the de-

parture of the troop-ship *Scrapis*, had been foreshadowed in the late Mr. Robertson's drama of "For Love," which dealt, among other things, with the tragedy of the wreck of the *Birkenhead*.

"Youth" sets forth, in eight acts or tableaux, a sort of modernised "Rake's Progress," much embellished, and well provided with the opportunities dear to stage-directors and carpenters, costumiers and scene-painters. Mr. Augustus Harris, the lessee and manager of the theatre, personates the hero of the story, assumes a variety of dresses, and otherwise distinguishes himself in the course of the performance. *Frank Darlington*, as the young man is called, has fallen a prey to the arts of a beautiful but unprincipled French lady, who owns the sparkling name of *Eve de Malvoisie*. By some means, intelligible to the dramatists possibly, *Frank* is made to seem guilty of the crime of forgery, although in truth wholly innocent, and becomes the inmate of a convict prison. Obtaining presently a ticket-of-leave, he enlists in a marching regiment, and is held to redeem his character and regain his social position by reason of his great display of valour at some distant place called Hawk's Point, vaguely fighting against the Afghans or the Boers, it was not quite clear which. Other characters of course occupy the scene at intervals. Mr. Ryder personates with much solemnity an elderly clergyman, the father of *Frank Darlington*—the *Rev. Joseph Darlington, Vicar of Beechley*—who, though very respectable, and even venerable in his age, had it seems gone sadly astray as a young man, and is now punished for his transgressions by the reappearance, after a lapse of thirty years, of a vindictive widow—one *Mrs. Walsingham*, who ought to have been *Mr. Darlington's* wife, but was not—who deals much in irony and makes money by usury, and

avenges what she considers to be her wrongs by hastening the ruin of the Vicar's son *Frank*. The wicked *Eve de Malvoisie* is also aided and abetted in her malefactions by one *Randal Reckley*, a vicious major in *Frank Darlington's* regiment. A convenient convict, *Tom Gardham*, appears in the later scenes, and proves himself the first husband of *Eve de Malvoisie*, just as *Frank Darlington* is regretting the indiscretion of which he had been guilty in taking to wife that heartless, worthless, but well-dressed and fascinating young woman. *Frank Darlington* is also supported by a stern-looking but excellent mother, well played by *Mrs. Billington*, and a virtuous and forgiving, if rather insipid cousin, *Miss Alice Wenlock*, who becomes the second wife of the unfortunate young man; while *Larry O'Pheysey*, a comic Irishman, is privileged to present himself unexpectedly in various guises at any period when the play seemed subsiding too completely into gloominess. Many such periods occurred, and a good deal—perhaps too much—was therefore seen of this *Larry O'Pheysey*. I must say that, to my thinking, Mr. Harry Jackson succeeds very much less as a comic Irishman than as a comic Jew.

“Youth” may probably answer the expectations of its producers. If the story is weak and the language puerile, and generally the work is of absurd and trashy quality, there are yet scenic exhibitions in “Youth” such as a large section of the public regards with fond admiration. It is thoroughly understood that the plays at Drury Lane are things rather to be looked at than listened to, and that the theatre thrives as the special home of “spectacular” effects. It is many years since George Colman wrote of the vast dimensions of the two patent houses, and their fitness merely for scenic magnificence:—

"When people appear  
 Quite unable to hear,  
 'Tis undoubtedly needless to talk,"—  
 adding,  
 "'Twere better they began  
 On the new invented plan,  
 And with telegraphs transmitted us the plot."

There was perhaps little that was worth hearing in "Youth," and the players, though often exhorted by the gallery to "speak up," were for the most part unskilled in the art of elocution, and frequently failed to make audible the diffuse dialogue they were charged to deliver. It may be for this reason that many passages of the drama escaped the efforts of the audience to comprehend them, and the story at times assumed an air of confusion and incoherence. The earlier scenes were inanimate and tedious enough, and it was not until *Frank Darlington* was discovered as a convict that much interest of a dramatic kind attached to his adventures. But the embarkation of the troops at Portsmouth and the battle fought at Hawk's Point by innumerable well-drilled supernumeraries, these were excellent displays of stage art, and roused the audience to special enthusiasm. The lavish use of blank-cartridges by the British forces, however, so filled the house with noises, fumes, and odours, that by the more sedate spectators the victory of our arms was strongly felt to be very dearly purchased. The view of the village of Beechley, with a railway train passing over the distant country, and the shifting panorama of the Upper Thames, were accepted as signal achievements on the part of the scene-painter, Mr. Hicks; while the appearance of Mr. Harris in boating-dress, paddling a canoe in a wild waste of Thames water, with artificial swans, curving their necks in a highly natural manner, attendant on him, and the river-banks flying past

to demonstrate the energy and rapidity of his movements, —this won almost the most rapturous applause of the evening. The room of Oriental aspect, adorned with Messrs. Gillow's furniture, and supposed to be the lodging of young *Darlington*, seemed to be far too palatial and magnificent for the occasion.

Plays of the class of "Youth" do not call into requisition the best powers of the performers. A strong company has been assembled at Drury Lane, however; and no doubt the players did all they could for the play. Miss Litton in tasteful dresses personates the meretricious *Eve de Malvoisie*, the character affording the actress very few opportunities. Mr. Vernon is forcible as the wicked *Major Reckley*; Mr. Arthur Matthison plays efficiently as *Colonel Dalton*; and the convict *Gardham* finds a humorous representative in Mr. Harry Nicholls, who comes I think from the Grecian Theatre. But the character most in favour with the audience seemed to be *Willie Spratley*, a young ensign, whose connection with the fable is of the slightest. Miss Caroline Hill plays *Willie Spratley* with admirable gaiety, good taste, and spirit.

CLIII.

"THE LIGHTS O' LONDON."

[Princess's Theatre. — September 1881.]

MR. SIMS'S "Lights o' London," is a five-act melodrama of the good old Adelphi pattern. The story deals exclusively with English life, abounds in stir and incident, blends the tragic and the comic in nice proportions, and submits to the audience many familiar sights and scenes. Albert Smith's playwright, Mr. Glenalvon Fogg, it may be remembered, held that the secret of success in dramatic composition consisted "in showing people what they know something about." On the stage, indeed, it is the known rather than the unknown that, it is accepted as the marvellous or the admirable; our audiences love old acquaintances. Acknowledging this opinion, Mr. Sims has brought into his play excellent pictures of the Borough Market on Saturday night, of the exterior of a casual ward, of the interior of a police-station, of the "slips" in Regent's Park, with the Regent's Canal and its bridges; and these exhibitions assuredly obtained cordial recognition and applause. It must not be understood, however, that "The Lights o' London" is a mere panoramic play, dependent for its success upon two or three strong mechanical effects, or that the author is but a subaltern to such captains as



the stage-carpenter or the scene-painter. Mr. Sims does not simply address himself to the eyes of his public; he compels them to listen, he interests them deeply, he is now humorous and now pathetic, he persuades them to laugh and to weep alternately. It may be objected that there is nothing absolutely novel about Mr. Sims's fable, and that many of his characters and his situations are rather of the conventional type. But, without doubt, the dramatist has made good use of his materials, however trite these in truth may be; has brought to bear upon his subject a force and freshness of thought and treatment peculiar to himself. The first act, which is what Mr. Boucicault would call of a "proloquial" character, seemed to me of somewhat over-artificial construction and to move stiffly; the personages of the plot appeared to suffer from the strain of dramatic exigency, to conduct themselves less according to the laws of reason and probability than in obedience to the arbitrary dictates of the author. But in the second act the comic characters arrived upon the scene, the story developed new sources of interest and excitement, and an impressive interview between an itinerant showman and an escaped convict—a very ingenious commingling of genuine pathos and broad comicality—fairly launched the play upon its very prosperous voyage. After this all was plain sailing; and the audience missed no opportunity of expressing their hearty approval of the "Lights o' London," its author, and interpreters.

Of course one knows beforehand that for our melodramas a comfortable conclusion is always in store, and that those who wait long enough may depend upon seeing poetical or theatrical justice fully vindicated: virtue will surely triumph, while vice will be duly abased and punished.

The time comes at last when the tables are turned, the suffering poor change places with the guilty rich, the mighty are put down from their seat and the humble and meek are exalted ; while as matters of detail the stolen jewels revert to their lawful proprietor, the lost will comes to light, the forger is hurried away detected and punished, for the innocent convict a royal pardon is forthcoming, and the true heir obtains possession of the valuable estates he has been so long and unrighteously deprived of. But if these happy issues are invariable results, the means by which the author designs to attain them are less apparent, and the spectators are interested in the struggles of the *dramatis personæ* to emerge from their labyrinthine difficulties and reach the rewards and the joys of the catastrophe. Mr. Sims is, I think, particularly happy in what I may call masking the batteries of his invention : he supplies his story every now and then with a new impetus, and so contrives that the incidents of the drama, however expected they may be, shall yet occur with the suddenness which ensures popular admiration and applause. Of course the work is of no great pretence, is indeed a direct bid for the favour of a miscellaneous audience, and does not disdain upon occasion recourse to time-honoured clap-traps and the indulgence of various British prejudices. At the same time Mr. Sims is a skilled author, who imparts an appreciable literary flavour to his productions, who writes dexterously and wittily, with abundant humour at command, and an intimate knowledge of many phases of London life, and whose sentiments and sympathies are as honestly felt as they are forcibly expressed. "The Lights o' London" pleased the audience beyond measure ; was received with an extraordinary show of favour. Nor need much abatement be made because of the custom which assigns raptures always to

first performances. The success was unquestionably as genuine as it was deserved. The play strikes me, indeed, as the best example of its class I have seen for many days or nights. Nor can I think that its prosperity will need much assistance from the industry of bill-stickers or advertising agents, the certificates or testimonials of clergymen, critics, and others. For nowadays certain plays resemble quack medicines: sufferers are persuaded to give evidence that they have greatly benefited by their exhibition.

The performance was altogether most satisfactory. Mr. Wilson Barrett proved himself very vigorous as the hero; Miss Eastlake as the heroine was energetic to excess. Mr. George Barrett, who is new to London, I think, as the showman *Jarvis* displayed strong natural humour, obtaining good support from the efforts of Mrs. Stephens and Miss Eugenie Edwards, who personated the itinerant manager's wife and son. Certain of the minor characters were particularly well sustained; I may instance the *Philosopher Jack* of Mr. Coote, a very life-like portrayal. The London street scenes were conducted with special spirit. On every side was evidence of ingenuity, painstaking, and managerial liberality.

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